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A MAID OF THE MOUNTAINS



CAROL

**A MAID OF
THE
MOUNTAINS
by
DOROTHY C. PAINE**



**PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
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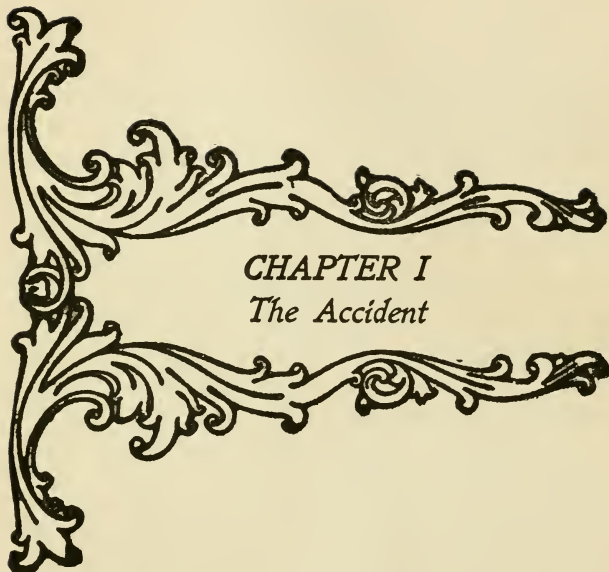
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CHAPTER I
The Accident



CHAPTER I

The Accident

NOTWITHSTANDING that Beth Davenport was born North and had lived in Florida only a few years, yet the Southland was home to her and she loved it very dearly.

"Oh, you needn't talk," said Harvey Baker, her best boy friend and a great tease, "you're a little Northerner through and through."

Whereupon her eyes snapped and she even stamped her foot. "I feel like a Southerner and that makes me one," she cried.

Therefore she was vastly pleased when her father bought a summer home up in the mountainous region of North Carolina. By spending the summers as well as the winters South, she hoped to appear more of a Southerner than ever.

She was a great lover of dogs, owning a number of them, and at first expected to take all her pets with her, but her father vetoed this plan.

"It's out of the question, Beth, our taking more than one dog to Tremont with us."

"Then I'll take Duke, of course," she answered, without an instant's hesitation. "There isn't another dog like him in all the world."

Bad as it was to leave her pets behind, parting from her friends was even worse, especially as she had little hope of seeing them for six months or more. Saying good-bye to Harvey Baker and to Julia Gordon was the greatest wrench.

"I—I didn't know how fond I was of them until it came to leaving them for so long," Beth confessed to her sixteen-year-old sister, Marian, after they were settled on the cars.

Never did a journey seem so long as that one to Beth. First one delay and then another occurred, so that at Spartanburg, South Carolina, where there was another wait, this time for the South bound train to pass, they were seven hours behind time, due mostly to severe storms that had caused washouts along the way.

Hardly had the train come to a standstill before Beth was out on the platform. For a moment she paused, not only for her father to catch up with her, but to look eagerly around.

The March sky was still of a leaden hue although temporarily the rain had ceased ; but a streak of lightning flashed across the west, followed by a low, threatening grumble. Yet neither the menacing state of the weather nor the muddy, rain-soaked clay roadway had kept people from congregating around the depot. Clay-bespattered horses and queer vehicles were lined along a railing while the natives themselves clustered around the incoming train.

Suddenly Beth realized that the coming summer was to reveal an entirely unfamiliar South to her. The prospect made her heart thrill; she did so love new experiences. But the mountaineers were very queer looking people, she thought.

"Papa," began Beth as she and Mr. Davenport walked toward the baggage car, "I'm so glad we're to spend the summer in the mountains. I expect to have just a grand time!"

Her father smiled in sympathy with her mood. "You generally do have a good time, Beth."

The baggageman in charge of Duke was evidently expecting them. He stood in the open doorway holding the dog by a great chain.

At sight of Beth, Duke tried to leap down to her, but a quick pull brought him to a standstill with his feet in mid-air.

"Aha, old fellow, I'm on to your tricks," said the man.

"Please, please let him come out," begged Beth in the manner that very few denied.

The instant Duke was free, with a leap and a bark, he was beside his young mistress. Then he bounded ahead, looking back longingly inviting her to a frolic with him. Only for a moment did she resist the challenge. She feared she was a little too old for such sport in sight of strangers, but, being still somewhat of a tomboy, she threw prudence to the winds and flew up the platform, after him.

"Don't be gone long," cautioned Mr. Davenport.

"Beth," called a voice from the day coach
"Beth!"

"Why, Marian, what are you doing in there?" answered Beth, surprised to see Marian leaning out of an open window.

"It was stuffy in the sleeper. Bring Duke in here a minute."

So Beth led Duke into the day coach where she perched herself on the arm of the seat beside her sister, still holding Duke by the collar.

"It's nice in here. You get mamma, and I'll bring papa back with me, and we'll stay until we reach Tremont," proposed Beth who always enjoyed a change.

"All right," agreed Marian.

Duke, growing restless, pulled on his collar, so Beth took him outside once more and let him go free. Whereupon he ran to the end of the platform as wildly glad as if hounding game. His feet hardly seemed to touch the platform, and Beth enjoyed chasing after him, her cheeks flushed and her eyes dancing with joy. As she turned to run back, the South bound train came into sight, so she called Duke to her and patting his head said :

"Now Duke, you've got to go in the baggage car a little while longer. Even if you do hate it in there, you're not sorry you came. You do

as I say about everything. You'd do anything for me, wouldn't you?"

A wag of his tail in answer made Beth more sure than ever that he knew her meaning. To her he was human in his intelligence, and, in fact, she was not far wrong.

At the baggage car, Duke drew back quivering as the man started to put on the chain.

"He'll not mind so much if I put it on him," Beth said, but as she leaned over Duke she noted a bad sore under his collar.

"Oh, the chain's cut the poor fellow," she said with a catch in her throat. As a usual thing she did not cry easily, but to have those hurt whom she loved, humankind or beast, made her indignant, and then the tears came unbidden.

"He mustn't be chained again. He'll be very good if he goes free the rest of the way. Promise me you'll be good, Duke."

He barked in answer, whereupon Beth smiled confidently at the man. "He says he'll be good. You'll not put that horrid chain on him, will you?"

"No, I guess I can let him go without it," the man answered.

"All aboard," cried the conductor.

Mr. Davenport came up just then and he and Beth hurried toward their car. "Oh, mamma and Marian were to be in here," said Beth at the steps of the day coach, and skipped ahead con-

ducting her father to where the other two members of the family were seated.

"Look, papa," Beth cried with her face pressed eagerly against the glass as the train pulled out into the open country.

On a low wooden porch in front of a cabin, sat five little colored girls all in a row. The end one grinned and hung her head, and the others too, smiled at the passing train.

"Wouldn't they make nice sweethearts for Gustus!" exclaimed Beth.

Gustus was her especial protégé. She it was who had discovered him when a ragged young urchin a number of years before, and ever since he had worked for the Davenports in Florida.

"Gustus would choose one of the end ones, as they are the jolliest," answered Mr. Davenport.

"It's already growing so dark that I can hardly see," Beth said a moment later. "I wish we had reached Tremont in the morning as we should have done. I hate so many horrid old delays." Her petulance was only momentary. "I wonder if Maggie will be down at the train to meet us," and a happy smile illumined her face at the thought of seeing again their old colored servant who had been sent ahead to get their home in readiness for them.

Once more she tried to peer through the fast gathering darkness, but the windows blurred so that in a few minutes she gave up the attempt.



"WOULDN'T THEY MAKE NICE SWEETHEARTS FOR GUSTUS"

"It's raining again," she murmured, and, restless, seizing upon her, she flounced across to an opposite seat. Having nothing to amuse her made her so sleepy that she yawned. Then her dark, curly head nodded. In an effort to keep awake, she looked around in hopes that some one would notice her, but no one did. With a sigh, she sank down on the cushioned seat, no longer struggling to keep her eyes open. On and on she slept.

"The next stop will be ours," said Mr. Davenport as the brakeman called Landrums. "We'd better go back and get our things together. Shall I waken Beth?"

"No, we need not disturb her now. We'll send the porter for her before we reach Tremont."

"It's stopped raining and the air is fine. I'd like to stay out here a few moments," cried Marian at the door. She walked to the topmost step of the platform which was not vestibuled on this side.

"Marian, do be careful," called her mother.

Laughing gayly, Marian looked around. "There isn't a particle of danger."

Not reassured, Mrs. Davenport stepped toward Marian, but because of the intense darkness turned to her husband for help. That instant there was a sudden, awful lurch, as if the train were being thrown from the track.

"Mamma! papa! Save me!" Marian shouted,

reaching out wildly to save herself, but at the same instant she was pitched headforemost out into the darkness. At the same instant both Mr. and Mrs. Davenport were thrown from their feet by the violence of the shock and hurled to the ground below.

The sound of hissing steam, a splintering of wood, and a crying out that was doubly terrifying in the darkness brought Mr. Davenport to his senses, but in such a confused state of mind that he could not think. He knew there was something he should remember, something awful, but his brain refused to work for the moment.

"Mary," he murmured from force of habit. He always turned to his wife in time of trouble. The name recalled the accident that had befallen his loved ones, and he rose to a sitting position.

"Mary—Marian," he called loudly.

"Here, James, here. Where's Marian?" The words came from the ground not far from his side. He started to kneel, and though every muscle ached, the physical pain was as nothing to the fear that his wife and children might be in a critical condition.

"Are you hurt, Mary?"

The question recalled his wife to the full meaning of the situation. She sprang up entirely forgetful of self.

"Marian—Beth," she sobbed, so weak her-

self that she tottered and would have fallen had not her husband caught her.

"You are hurt," he cried.

"Don't think of me," she murmured. "Marian—Beth, we must find them," and the thought of their danger strengthened her. "Marian, Marian," she called, and began rushing around in frantic search of her child.

Mr. Davenport drew out his match case, but the wind made it difficult to get a light. With extreme care, he finally succeeded, only to have the light go out without revealing the whereabouts of their lost daughter.

"Marian, Marian," called Mrs. Davenport, half frenzied.

"She's here," cried Mr. Davenport suddenly. At the same instant by aid of the flickering match, Mrs. Davenport saw the apparently lifeless figure of Marian stretched out on the soft clay not far from the track. She rushed to Marian and raised her close to her own beating heart, as if she hoped to give her child life by the intensity of her love.

"Speak to me, Marian. Mother is here. Mother will save you."

"Let her have air. It will bring her to, Mary."

With a shudder Marian revived. "What has happened?" she asked.

No answer was possible, they having no

more idea than she of the nature of the accident. Assured now that one daughter lived, the mother's heart was anxious yet fearful to know the fate of her baby. "Beth—we must find her, James," she cried, loosening Marian's hold of her arm.

"Mamma, don't leave me. I'm so afraid," sobbed Marian hysterically.

"You stay with her, Mary. I'll see what has happened," and with these words Mr. Davenport started toward the track.

"Marian, can't you come, too? Just think, Beth——" Tears so choked Mrs. Davenport that she could not finish.

Marian struggled to her feet, but sank back with a cry. "Oh, my ankle! It hurts terribly."

A man carrying a lantern loomed up suddenly through the darkness.

"What's happened? Please tell us what's happened!" cried Mrs. Davenport.

The man swung the lantern their way. "Why, you're the mother of the girl with the dog! That dog saved my life. If I hadn't just opened the door to let him out at Tremont, I'd have been in the burning cars this minute. I was thrown ——"

"Burning cars?" repeated Mrs. Davenport with a terrible fear clutching at her throat. "Hurry, hurry, we must save Beth; she may be in the burning cars," and grasping the man by the arm she started away with him.

"Mamma, don't leave me," sobbed Marian, but her cry was unheeded. Then she hobbled forward a step or two, but sank back on the ground, her ankle paining greatly. The beating of her heart almost suffocated her so sore afraid was she on her own account. But when she beheld flames burst up through the darkness, her own terror was overcome in dread for her sister's fate.

"Beth, dear little sister Beth, only live and I'll never tease you again as long as I live," she sobbed.

Feeling utterly helpless, she cried as if her heart would break, but all the while the prayer in her heart was, "God save Beth. Guide us to my dear, dear sister."

Suddenly, something wet and cold touched her hand which caused her to shriek aloud. In the darkness and horror of the hour, she imagined all sorts of wild possibilities.

"It might be a snake; it might be a wildcat or ——"

A whine and a pawing at her dress made her gasp for very joy.

"Duke! Dear old Duke!" She raised up and hugged him. "We must find Beth, Duke. She may be in that burning car there." Her voice was still broken with sobs, and Duke whined as if he shared her fear.

Never, as long as she lived, did Marian forget

the awful uncertainty of that time. For a moment she was hopeful. By the light of the flames she saw that some of the rear coaches were still on the track and one of them was half on and half off, and from these cars the fortunate sleeping-car passengers were coming forth, bruised and well scared, but with little real injury.

Marian, forgetful of sprained ankle and bruises, limped over to the nearest man. Duke watched her actions anxiously.

"Can you tell me where to find the day coach?" she asked hardly able to speak distinctly because of her sobs.

"It's tumbled down into the ditch there. The engine, the baggage cars and the day coach all went over, and they're burning up now."

For an instant Marian feared she was going to faint. Everything went round and round with her, and she experienced such a terribly sickening sensation that she grasped Duke to save herself from falling.

The man had a family of his own to see to, but his heart went out in sympathy to this young girl whose manner bespoke trouble.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked kindly.

Words were impossible to Marian at that instant, besides which she felt that there was no help for Beth, that she was beyond human aid; so Marian only looked at the man blankly and shook

her head. Whereupon he left her believing that the horror of the wreck accounted for her distress.

Marian sank down on her knees beside Duke too much overcome for the moment for further action.

"You'll never see Beth again, Duke," she sobbed. "She's burning to death."

The dog whined and caught at her dress as if he would have her move on again. Such action aroused a little hope within her.

"Perhaps there *is* some way to save her," she murmured struggling to her feet. "We'll see, Duke. Beth must not burn. We *must* save her."

She still was so weak that if Duke had not walked patiently beside her, letting her cling to him, she would have fallen again before reaching the far side of the track, overlooking the ditch where the wrecked cars lay in such a confused mass that Marian felt more helpless than ever. To find Beth in that awful, burning wreckage seemed an almost hopeless undertaking.

Duke, she felt, was her only hope; but so greatly did she dread that he might not understand what she wanted that had any other help been offered, she would have discarded the aid of the faithful dog. In fact she looked all around for other help before appealing to him. Then not until he, impatient of delay, caught at her dress again did she make her appeal to him.

"Duke," she sobbed and her heart beat so convulsively that to tell him what she wished was very hard. "Beth's somewhere there—in the car—the one where she took you this afternoon. Find her, or——" Possibly her breaking down told more to the faithful dog than words.

He whined, looked up at her an instant, and then bounded down the ditch. Marian hobbled after him as best she could. She stumbled several times but managed to keep her feet. Duke waited only to assure himself that Marian was following. He gave no heed to the people who were running hither and thither in the darkness with small wit for action. The terror of wreck and fire had overmastered them. Duke, however, seemed to know exactly what was required of him. He hurried so fast toward the dismantled cars that Marian had great difficulty in keeping up with him. Only once did he wait for a word from her. Just before they reached the wreck, he paused for her to overtake him, then he looked from her toward the flames and whined.

"Yes, Duke, Beth's there. Find Beth, Duke."

Whereupon, either because he scented the whereabouts of his dear mistress, or because he had been in the car, or, as Marian believed, because a higher power guided him in answer to her prayer, he made his way direct to the dismantled day coach, and, settling down, set up a

howl. He knew that they now needed outside aid, but only Marian was near to heed.

"Oh, Duke," she sobbed, "we can't get in there. Beth'll burn. Oh, oh, oh!"

For a moment fear paralyzed all action with her. Duke never ceased howling an instant and then it came to her that if she called it might attract attention.

"Some one come and save my sister! She's here burning up! Come! come!" Her cries and Duke's persistent howling brought people to the spot.

"My sister—save her!" was all Marian could sob.

"Where is she?" demanded a man.

"Right in there, I think," and she pointed to the burning car.

"Here's an axe. We'll soon have her out if she's there," and they went to work to save human life if possible.

Mr. and Mrs. Davenport, unsuccessful in their search, heard Duke howl and Marian call and rushed to find out the meaning of the summons.

"Oh, mamma, Beth must be in there. Just see the way Duke acts." Marian pointed excitedly toward the man with the axe.

Close beside him stood Duke, very careful not to get in the way. Now that every effort was being made toward the deliverance of his beloved mistress, his howling ceased, but he waited with

muscles tense, sniffing the air as if hounding game.

Mr. Davenport immediately went to help in the work of rescue. Marian clung to her mother and would not loosen her hold.

"I must go to Beth; I must go," Mrs. Davenport cried.

"There's nothing we can do to help, mamma. Let's ask God to save Beth. He'll not let her burn, I know."

The girl's faith had a quieting effect on the distracted mother, who, notwithstanding her frenzy of fear, realized that at the present moment she would only be in the way, and so she prayed over and over :

"God save Beth. God save Beth."

While the two prayed, their eyes never turned from the burning wreck. Though the men worked with almost superhuman strength, it seemed to Mrs. Davenport that if only she had an axe she could do better than they, notwithstanding her physical disadvantage.

"Oh, why do they not hurry?" she moaned. "They must hurry."

Nearer and nearer every instant crept the flames, and if it had not been for the water-soaked condition of the cars, the brave rescuers would have had little chance of success, for even as it was, the flying cinders showered down all around them, sometimes badly scorching them.

"I can't stand the heat," cried the man with the axe.

"Give it to me," demanded Mr. Davenport, but one of the railroad employees seized the axe, and went to work with such herculean strength that Beth's father was content seeing how strong the new man was.

But the flames too were getting fiercer. They hissed out at the wet wood, and with their deadly, fiery touch licked up the water, after which all within reach was easy prey before their deadly fangs.

A sudden shout caused Mrs. Davenport's heart almost to stop beating.

"Thank God; thank God," she murmured, but the next instant she was less hopeful.

Even though the car could now be entered, flames so encircled the opening that fear seized upon all present, holding them back from entering the car.

"We must save Beth," cried the distracted mother, loosening Marian's hold to rush toward the flames.

But faithful Duke was ahead of her. Into the burning coach he bounded while at his side went Mr. Davenport. Immediately others followed.

Mrs. Davenport, herself, would have rushed on into the burning car had she not been stopped.

"Oh, let me go," she implored feeling that she could not endure longer the agony of inaction.

"I must go. Oh, will they ever bring Beth out?"

The moments she was kept in suspense seemed an eternity to her.

Then through the smoke she beheld Mr. Davenport with faithful Duke close at his heels emerge from the opening. At first she was so blinded by tears that she could not see if their quest had been rewarded; but when she groped her way to them, there in her husband's arms was her child. So overjoyed was she at this vision that her little remaining strength almost gave way. Then an overwhelming fear clutched at her heart.

"She lives, tell me that she lives," she sobbed.

Duke turned to Marian and whined. If he could have spoken, he would have said:

"I knew what you wanted, didn't I? We found her very near where I led you. I was sure she was there."

Marian broke down completely. She knelt beside him, and throwing her arms about him sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Dear, dear Duke, if Beth ——" she could not finish.

Duke licked her hand as much as to say, "Don't grieve. We've saved her," and Marian was comforted by his silent sympathy.



CHAPTER II
The Home-Coming



CHAPTER II

The Home-Coming

MAGGIE, the Davenports' trusted servant, had their new home on the hill lighted from top to bottom. Although she had already done everything possible to make the house appear most attractive, every now and then she poked the fires afresh and rearranged the flowers in the different rooms.

"They sholy ought to be hyere," she muttered. "It jes' do seem as how I can't wait to see little missy's face. She'll be dat pleased dat she'll hug me mos' to death. She ——"

Footsteps sounded on the porch, but they were muffled.

Maggie's face beamed. "Dat's Missy Beth, sho'. She's tryin' to sneak in so's to fool her ole mammy. She's made de odders wait while she tries to fool me. Dat chile am up to all manner ob tricks." She chuckled to herself all the while she was hurrying to swing open the front door. "I'll pretend not to know her. I'll say, 'See hyere, yo' little stranger, yo'; what yo' doin' up hyere at dis gran' house?' I'll teach her to play tricks on her ole mammy dat jes' dotes on her."

As Maggie reached the door a timid knocking sounded upon the outside. She swung the door impressively open, and looking up instead of down began :

“See hyere, yo’ little stranger, yo’; what yo’——”

“I ’lowed as how yer hain’t heard. I cum to tell yer,” piped out a strange voice trembling both from excitement and bashfulness.

So dumbfounded was Maggie that she stared down at the stranger without saying a word.

At first sight the superstitious colored woman felt as if wind and storm had brought an elf to her door. A little thing with shoulders slightly stooped, as if too heavy burdens had been placed thereon, stood looking up appealingly into the black face above, generally most kind but now stern from doubt and disappointment.

“I done feel creepy when I looked on dat chile firs’,” Maggie confessed afterward. “An’ it done make me cross to de pooh little thing. I had a predominate”—she meant premonition—“dat somethin’ ter’ble was comin’, an’ I snapped out at her, ‘What yo’ want? Who am yo’ anyhow?’ so dat she jes’ jumped scared-like an’ bust into tears. Den I knowed she wuz human an’ I drew her inside to close out de storm.”

Once inside Maggie eyed the child critically. Judged by size, the stranger might have been twelve, but the careworn face, its natural pale-

ness intensified now by the occurrences of the night, made her seem more like a girl of eighteen. Tears were still rolling down from her great blue eyes although she was trying hard to suppress them, and she stood nervously twisting her faded calico dress which clung limply wet to her shivering little figure.

"Who am yo', chile?" demanded Maggie again but a little more kindly.

"I'm Carol."

"Hump," thought Maggie to herself, "what does a mountain chile want with a gran', high-falutin' name like dat, but I reckon none ob de pooh white trash has much sense noways!"

"Have yer hearn of the wreck?" asked Carol.

Maggie actually turned pale, and grasped Carol roughly by the arm so that the child winced.

"Wreck? What yo' mean, chile? Speak."

"The train from Spartanburg ——"

That was all Maggie heard. She threw her arms wildly above her head and broke forth into wild lamentation.

"Oh, my honey lambs, dey am killed shure! God let dis ole black heart break too, fur if dey am dead dere am nothin' to lib fur. Oh, God, save us, save us."

"Yer folks may not be hurt," cried Carol sympathetically. "All I know is that they've sent up to Hendersonville fur a train an' doctors. I wuz down huntin' up my paw when I hearn of

the wreck. We uns live down in the hollow on yer place, an' I knowed 'bout yer folks comin' to-night so I runned to tell yer 'bout the wreck."

At this moment the man who had been sent down to drive the family up the hill returned and confirmed Carol's story. Maggie lost her head completely. She sank down all in a heap on the nearest rocker, and, howling and moaning wildly, swayed back and forth with no thought for action. Carol waited awhile longing to comfort the poor old black mammy, but finally, seeing no way in which she could help, went unobserved out into the stormy night.

She was undecided whether to return home, or to go down to the station, there to wait around to see if she could learn anything more. So interested was she in the family coming to the hill that she forgot that her mother had sent her out to hunt up her father. This interest finally landed her at the station again.

"If the cars had gone out on the trestle and then over, not a soul would have escaped. I'm told the wreck occurred just the other side of the trestle," Carol heard a man say.

The trestle was only a mile or two away, Carol knew, and she was tempted to run down to the scene of disaster, but at that instant she saw the village doctor on horseback prepared to ride to the assistance of the wounded. Immediately Carol ran breathlessly after him. She did not

feel bashful with him because he had been most kind to her own folks on many occasions.

"Doctah, doctah," she called out in distress for fear she could not overtake him.

The wind was blowing his way so that he heard her call and recognized the voice, but at first was tempted not to stop. However he liked Carol and so called back impatiently:

"You must not delay me, Carol, unless it's very important."

She rushed panting up beside his horse.

"Hit's 'bout the people on the hill. They're in the wreck, an' ——"

"I know," he interrupted hastily. "Mr. Davenport sent word for me to come when they sent word to Spartanburg. I must hurry."

She longed to ask questions; to know what to expect, but putting her own curiosity aside, said:

"Is thar anythin' could be done up at their place? If they uns air hurt ——"

He had not thought of any preparations at this end, but in an instant saw the wisdom of her suggestion.

"Yes, Carol, you are right. In the first place we need a wagon with a good soft mattress at the station. Do you think you can see to having one there by the time the rescue train returns? It is very important, but I should not stop to ——"

"I'll tell um up at the house, an' we'll have hit

sure," she interrupted, feeling the importance of the trust.

"That's a good girl, Carol," the doctor called as he galloped away.

From the moment Carol had heard that the house on the hill was to be occupied for the summer she had been interested; and when she found that two girls were coming she was more interested than ever. There had been little time or chance for pleasure in her young life, but she was always dreaming dreams of what might happen. These dreams were about all that gave color to her life, and the coming of the Davenports had taken hold of her imagination in a particularly vivid way. In spite of the vast difference in their social position, she had imagined herself a friend, a great friend, at least of one of the girls. This make-believe friendship was as beautiful as a fairy story to her, but very real also. So when she heard of the wreck, she felt very badly, and now was delighted because she could do something for her unknown little friend.

She flew back up the hill with a much lighter heart than when she came down.

She knocked at the door a second time with much more assurance.

Again Maggie answered her call hoping for news.

"Yo' hyere 'gin," said Maggie disappointedly.

"The doctah sent me," announced Carol breathlessly, and her face was so much brighter that Maggie herself began to feel more cheerful.

The colored mammy was delighted to have something to do for her loved ones, and after learning the girl's mission felt more kindly disposed toward Carol, although in her thought she had no use for "pooh white trash" as she termed those of Carol's class. Together they attended to getting the wagon and fitting it out as the doctor desired.

Carol hoped that she might be asked to ride down to the train, but Maggie had no such idea.

"I'm goin' down to meet um. Yo' kin run 'long now," she said to Carol, and added grudgingly, "I has to thank yo' fer what yo' has done."

"I was glad to do anythin' fer ——" Carol almost said "her" but added "um," remembering that the colored woman did not know about her imagined friendship.

"She will know in time," she thought sadly as Maggie departed without her, "and then she'll be nicer to me."

To Maggie the hardest part of this trying night was waiting for the rescue train. While she longed to have it come, she dreaded that it might only mean new sorrow to her. And finally when she beheld the gleam of the oncoming engine, it struck new terror to her soul.

"It do look like an eye ob death," she thought,

and as the train came to a standstill, and she went aboard, her look was very mournful. But the black, tearful face appeared almost angelic to Mrs. Davenport and Marian.

"O Maggie," sobbed Marian.

"Oh, my precious honey lambs. Thank de good Lawd," and Maggie, crying and laughing in the same breath, gathered both Mrs. Davenport and Marian to her motherly bosom. Then she noted Beth, so very white and still that for a moment she thought the child was dead. Never had she been so overcome. She gasped for breath and the next instant a piercing cry escaped her.

"Hush, Maggie, hush," cautioned Mrs. Davenport. "The doctor says she'll be all right in time. Unless ——" she could not add as he had, "unless there's some internal injury." She would not think anything so terrible possible.

Maggie knelt beside her little mistress and tears rained down her cheeks.

"My own honey lamb," she moaned. "Yo' mustn't die. I needs yo', honey." Beth's heavy lids flickered and then slowly opened. No conscious word had passed her lips since the accident, although she had muttered sometimes incoherently.

"Maggie, my dear good Maggie," she murmured and added as if her mind was not dwelling on the accident, "We've brought Duke with us, Maggie. We'll have lots of fun."

"Of co'se, honey lamb," said the old mammy.

Tenderly Maggie lifted Beth and helped carry her from the train to the mattress provided in the waiting wagon.

The doctor accompanied the family up the hill to their new home. The home-coming was very different from what had been planned ; but the almost miraculous escape from death, which had been very near them all so short a while back, and faithful Maggie's loving care lightened the gloom.

Beth was taken up-stairs to the front wing of the house into a large room opening on wide piazzas.

"This is so nice," she murmured, only half conscious as they placed her on the bed. "I'm glad we have Maggie."

Tears, welling up again, trickled down the black cheeks. "Law, honey, not anyways near so glad as I dat I has my honey gal."

Then the faithful soul, fearful that she might break down completely, hurried over to the fireplace and poked the logs that she had lighted to give such cheer as possible. The flames shot up casting wierd lights over the floor and walls.

"Dey jes' can't send me out ob dis room dis night," she muttered to herself. "Miss Mary needs rest, an' I'm sholy de one to watch. I'll jes' tell de doctah how it am."

She waited with beating heart until he was

through with Beth for the night, and then whispered to him, "Tell Miss Mary, doctah, dat ole Maggie's de one to stay hyere dis night. Yo's seen, hasn't yo', dat I'se to be trusted?"

He nodded his head in quick approval, having noted how she anticipated his needs.

"Mrs. Davenport, your old mammy wishes to watch your child to-night, and I approve," he said, and when he saw that she was about to demur added, "It is positively necessary for you to husband your strength. Beth will need care for the next month or so."

Mrs. Davenport's heart sank. "A month or two for my active Beth," she thought. "It will be terrible for her, but then it might have been so much worse. I suppose the doctor's right about Maggie's watching to-night. I know she'll take as good care of Beth as I would myself."

"All right, Maggie," she said aloud, "you may watch Beth."

Maggie's face expressed her pleasure. She quietly moved over to the bed and seated herself.

"De honey lamb is sleepin'," she whispered to Mrs. Davenport. "She'll sholy be bettah when she wakes."

"And you'll call me, Maggie, if she wants me?"

"Of co'se, an' yo' nebbeh knowed me to break my word, has yo'?"

"No, never, Maggie. God bless and keep you,

my precious," she murmured as she stooped over Beth. Then she turned to go.

"Maggie," she whispered at the door, "Duke's here. Perhaps you'd better take him down to the kitchen and lock him up for the night. He might disturb Beth."

After her departure, Maggie hesitated. "It do seem a perfect shame aftah he's been an' saved her life. He won't 'sturb her, I knows. Didn't he watch outside her door down in Floridah when she had de fevah, an' nebbeh onct 'sturbed her? No 'deed, for she liked him dar. I reckon Miss Mary done disrecollected dat for if she hadn't, she'd have let him stay, too." Where-upon she reseated herself.

An hour passed in perfect silence. Then a quiet pawing at the door announced that Duke had wakened. Maggie rose to quiet him. Beth's eyes opened. They appeared more natural looking than at any time since the accident.

"What is it, Maggie?"

Maggie's heart fluttered. She felt guilty. "I was done tole to lock Duke in de kitchen for de night, but I jes' hadn't de heart to do it. I'll go an' lock him up dis minute, howsomever."

"No, no, Maggie. I want him in here. Bring him in."

Maggie gladly did as bidden.

"Now, Duke, yo' mustn't bodder her," she cautioned at the threshold.

He eyed her reproachfully, gave one loving look toward the bed, then stalked majestically over to the fireplace, and settled down there for the night.

"He's a dear fellow, Maggie," Beth murmured, "a very dear dog. I love him."

"She done love ev'body an' ev'thin'," thought Maggie as her charge sank back to sleep. "She's de lovin'est chile I ebbeh knowed. If she'd been killed dis ole heart ob mine done cracked in a thousan' pieces. Dat's what."

At that very moment Duke looked around at her, and Maggie noted an unusually soft glow in his eyes.

"He's thinkin' de same thing, I reckon. I jes' specs he loves her as much as I do, if dat's possible."

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CHAPTER III
The Surprise

CHAPTER III

The Surprise

EVERY hillside and valley around Tremont was abloom. The May air had a June balminess which, as it floated through the open windows to Beth, made her more restless than ever.

"Tell me about the mountains and the flowers," she demanded wearily of Marian who was seated in the room with her. "It's dreadful to be in here when it's so beautiful outside," and she sank down among the pillows piled up back of her and sighed. Then she shook her head so vigorously that her curls of brown flew all about her flushed face in wildest confusion. "I suppose I ought to be thankful every minute that I wasn't killed, or that I didn't lose my legs or something else even more dreadful. Am I a terribly ungrateful girl, Marian?"

"No, dear; I think you bear being shut up beautifully. We all think so."

Beth's heart lightened although she felt undeserving of such unstinted praise. "Let me see. How long is it since I was hurt? Over a month, isn't it?"

"Yes, it was the last of March when we came."

"And I'm to be taken down-stairs to-morrow, but I'm afraid it will be some time before I'm out again. This last waiting is the hardest. I wish Harvey and Julia were here. It wouldn't be so bad then."

Marian smiled. "How many times have you wished for them since you were hurt?"

Beth looked over at her whimsically. "I couldn't possibly count. It's been many more times than I've told."

In thinking of her two friends, Beth forgot the outside world, and was so quiet that Marian thought she had fallen asleep. So thought some one else listening outside. The door opened very cautiously.

"Is she asleep, Marian?" came in a whisper from the half open door.

Marian rushed over to the door, for a glance at the bed had shown her that Beth was still awake.

"Hush, hush," Beth heard her sister caution, and then Marian slammed the door behind her.

Beth was indignant and also wildly curious. "Marian, come back," she called.

"Yes, Beth, I'm coming in a minute," but she waited so long that Beth again called her.

"Marian, do come. I think it's awfully mean of you to leave me here alone!"

In answer Marian opened the door, but only half way.

"Who's with you, Marian?"

Marian made no answer, but when she reëntered the room her face was unusually flushed, and her eyes sparkled. A smile hovering around her mouth made Beth still more curious, but she was given no chance to repeat her question.

"Beth, you ought to be asleep this minute."

"She doesn't want to answer. There is something going on," thought Beth. Then she said aloud, "Marian, who ——"

"Mamma'll blame me for keeping you awake," Marian rattled on choosing a seat with her back toward Beth. "If you keep on getting excited over nothing like you do, you'll not be able to go down-stairs to-morrow, and ——"

Beth raised herself on her elbow. Her eyes sparkled too. She did not intend to be fooled another minute.

"Marian, it sounded like Julia talking."

"Why, Beth, the very idea," Marian only half turned her head. "Once to-day you thought you heard Harvey talking, and now you imagine you hear Julia. You've them so on your mind that you even take mamma for them."

"Was mamma really and truly out there just now?"

"Yes."

"Oh," sighed Beth disappointedly. "Well," settling herself once more on the pillows, "tell me about the mountains, and I'll go to sleep."

"I didn't have to tell there was some one else out there too," thought Marian. She now faced Beth. "You've already heard all about papa's and my trip up Tremont Mountain."

"Named after a revolutionary hero," supplemented Beth sleepily.

"Oh, Beth, you should have been with us yesterday afternoon," Marian's eyes sparkled. "We went only a short way, but it was the nicest ride I ever had. Did I tell you how the Rocky Spur road curves around and around? At first you see the mountains only on the right, but below is the railroad winding up the valley. We took short cuts which were so steep that I held my breath for fear the horses would tumble backward. The valley beyond Piney was suddenly right before us, but I didn't look down much, for towering beyond us was Hogback."

Beth's eyes that were beginning to droop opened wide. "I can't help smiling whenever I hear that name. Does the mountain really look like a hog's back?"

"If you've a good imagination. But, Beth, you're not going to sleep, as you promised."

"I'm more anxious to see Melrose Falls than any place else. You know papa promised that we may camp there when I'm well."

So happy was Beth thinking of camp life that she soon fell asleep. Then she dreamed a beautiful dream. Her room was transformed into a

bower of green—almost like the woods for which she so pined. The rustling of the boughs, the refreshing smell of evergreen and wild flowers enravished her senses. Never had she experienced such a real dream.

“It’s strange,” she thought half awake, but with her eyes still closed, “I’m awake now, and I still smell evergreens and flowers.”

“She’s stirring. We must hide in the closet and march out as planned.” It was Marian’s whispering that Beth heard. People on tiptoe seemed to be flying from different corners of the room, and some one giggled.

“Just like Julia. I’m not awake,” decided Beth, and wishing for her dream to go on as long as possible she would not try to open her eyes. She almost feared to stir again so intent was she on having the dream continue.

For a moment all was still. Then once more there was a tiptoeing.

“She’s falling asleep again. What shall we do? Shall we waken her?”

The voice was surely Harvey’s, and Beth wished she could waken and really see him.

“Let’s pretend that she’s a fairy queen. It would please her.” The voice belonged to Julia now, and the muffled tread of feet came nearer.

“Are you talking about me? I do think it would be great fun to be a fairy queen.” Beth said the words aloud without really intending to

do so, but everything was so very real that just thinking of things did not suit the occasion.

"We all come to serve Beth, our fairy queen," and with the chorus of voices Duke barked, which was so unmistakably lifelike that Beth opened her eyes. Then she rubbed them vigorously.

"Oh, Julia! Oh, Harvey!" she gasped. "Am I really and truly awake? Are you really you? Oh, if only it's true! Come here and let me feel you to make sure."

A girl and a boy, about thirteen and fourteen years of age, were almost within reach. Harvey, the boy, was looking right at Beth with his honest, kindly eyes aglow with affection. The girl, Julia, was acting just like her own dear self. Hardly still an instant, she danced around and around the bed, and clapped her hands, crying:

"It's a perfect surprise! You like being a fairy queen, don't you, Beth?"

Beth held her arms wide open. "Come over here, dear, and I'll show you how much I like it."

Julia rushed over and kissed her, not once, but a dozen times. And Harvey squeezed her hand so hard that it actually ached, but she did not mind in the least.

Beyond Harvey and Julia, Beth saw her mother and father and sister Marian, with Duke by her side.

She smiled at them all lovingly, then her eyes



"HOW WELL YOU LOOK IN YOUR CADET UNIFORM"

took in the transformation that had been wrought in her room. In one short hour it had been converted into a perfect bower, just like her dream. Great garlands of evergreens were festooned all over the wall; luxuriant boughs of hardy rhododendrons, and daintier ones of mountain laurel had been placed wherever there was room; in vases were wild honeysuckle and other sweet-scented flowers. There were no lamps lighted, but the rosy glow from the declining sun made everything more fairy like.

"Oh, oh!" sighed Beth ecstatically. "I can hardly believe even yet that I'm awake."

"Of course you're awake," cried Marian, her tone almost as joyful as Beth's. "Haven't you made me almost lie to you two or three times to-day? You did hear Harvey, and Julia was outside with mamma, but I wouldn't tell you although I was just dying to. We'd worked so hard to surprise you, it wouldn't have been fair to spoil the others' fun, especially when Harvey and Julia had come so far to visit us."

Mention of her two friends drew Beth's eyes to them once more. "Harvey Baker, how you've grown," she exclaimed, her eyes glistening. She was hysterically happy. "You've grown an inch or two in the last month and how well you look in your cadet uniform."

He drew himself up to his full height. "What do you expect, young lady, that we'll

stand still? You're not in your teens like the rest of us. You know I attend a Military Academy now."

She made a face at him. "Well, I don't care, I'm growing, too. You'll be surprised when you see me stand up. I'm very much taller than Julia, even if she is a year older than I."

"Never mind," retorted Julia, "when you're ready to climb trees again, you'll envy me. Being small helps me to get around faster."

"No one will deny that," agreed Marian. "You should have seen her flying around, Beth, getting this room ready. She wasn't still an instant."

"Neither were the rest of you," declared loyal Julia.

"Whose idea was it?" questioned Beth.

"Your mother's," answered Mr. Davenport, coming forward.

"Oh, mamma," sighed Beth rapturously, casting a very loving look her mother's way.

"You mustn't give me all the credit, Beth. Just wait until you see the presents they all have for you."

"Presents? Presents for me? I don't know why so many grand things are happening. It's not my birthday."

"We're celebrating because we're so thankful that you were spared to us and because you'll

soon be up now. That's even better than a birthday."

"'Cose it am, Missy Beth," cried a voice in the doorway.

Beth turned suddenly, doubtful of her hearing.

"Gustus—you, too? It's really too good to be true."

The darky lad in the doorway swelled visibly with pride. "No, it ain't, Missy Beth. Miss Mary she sent foh me 'cose my little mistress done be spared from de jaws ob death. She 'lowed as how you'd be pleased."

"I'm delighted, Gustus."

His eyes sparkled. "I done fetched somethin' all de way from Florida foh yo'. I'll run an' fetch it here."

"I must bring in my present, too," cried Julia, rushing after him.

"Here's your doll. I made the new clothes for it," said Marian handing Beth's doll to her. But her ladyship appeared so fine that for a moment Beth hardly recognized her old playmate. She examined the finery reverently, too pleased to speak. Then she cried out:

"Oh,—a broadcloth coat with real fur! A hat with feathers! A pink silk dress, and pink stockings and shoes to match! Oh, and such fine underclothing I never saw! Marian, you're the best sister in all the world."

"See what Harvey has in his pocket for you,"

cried Marian, who was as greatly excited as Beth. She was wild for the time to come to speak of her father's present, but that was to be reserved for the last.

Beth's eyes were now riveted on Harvey's coat pocket. "What's in there, Harvey? It's moving."

He took from the pocket in question a tiny gray squirrel, and placed it in his little friend's keeping.

Beth ran her hand lovingly over the soft fur of her new pet. "Oh, Harvey, I've always wanted a squirrel. How did you know?"

"I remembered your once saying you wanted one."

The squirrel accepted Beth as his mistress quite readily, and snuggled down in the bed-clothes beside her.

Beth's attention was attracted from the squirrel by the entrance of Julia with a covered cage in her hand. Quickly the cover was removed, and a burst of sweet song followed.

"A mocking-bird, how lovely!" cried Beth rapturously. "It makes me feel as if I were back in Florida."

"An' dis kitten ob yo's dat I fetched all de way from Florida'll make it seem moah homelike," cried Gustus, who had followed behind Julia.

"How nice of you, Gustus." She really was pleased with the kitten, but she had so much to

think about that she had no time to play with it now. In the new excitement, she forgot for a moment about the squirrel. But when she started to put the kitten under the covers, not knowing how else to dispose of it, the squirrel awakened, so greatly frightened that it sprang out and ran to the foot of the bed where it perched on the foot-board, chattering and showing its teeth. Gustus sprang after it, but at his approach the squirrel darted farther away, landing on top of a rocker. Gustus still pursued, whereupon the squirrel sprang over on Harvey's shoulder, and, turning upon Gustus, showed its teeth even more than it had a moment before, scolding away in true squirrel fashion.

Gustus's eyes rolled until only the whites showed, and his sides shook from good-natured laughter.

"Ho, ho, ho! How do dat little imp know I'se black? It wouldn't be 'fraid ob me if I wuz white like you all. Jes' hear 'im. Him says, 'Gustus, yoh black niggah yoh, don't yoh come near me. I don't like yo' black skin. I likes white folks.'"

Beth feared that he might feel hurt notwithstanding his laughter.

"He'll get used to you soon, Gustus."

"Get used to a black boy like me? I reckon not, Missy Beth. 'Pears like dey nebbah do like black folks. Ho, ho, ho! Jes' hear 'im keep on scoldin'."

The opening of the door interrupted him. Maggie poked her turbaned head into the room.

"Suppeh's all ready, if yoh all's ready foh it."

Beth's face fell. She hated to have them leave her even for a short while, but she would utter no word of complaint because they had all been so good to her. She turned her face toward the wall so that they might not see that she felt badly.

Quite a bustling in the room followed. Curiosity overcame Beth's momentary bad feelings, and she looked to see what was going on. Two tables, already set for supper, had been brought in and placed together. Vases of flowers, real roses brought all the way from Florida, adorned the tables, and chairs were being drawn around the festal board.

"Oh, are you going to eat in here?" questioned Beth.

"Yes, 'deed, honey," answered Maggie who had just reëntered, carrying a great platter of fried chicken. Behind her came Gustus with the sweet potatoes and hot biscuits. "I 'lowed as how our little queen'd like to have company for supper dis night."

"I guess I really am a fairy queen," murmured Beth as the others seated themselves. For a moment or two she was in such an ecstatic frame of mind that she hardly realized that she was still on earth. Then as the covers were lifted from

the steaming dishes, earthly desires once more took possession of her.

"I'm hungry, I want something to eat," she called.

"Yoh done has de fust helpin', honey," declared Maggie, carrying a tray full of dainties that she had prepared herself, and which she placed on a pillow in front of Beth. Never did Beth enjoy a meal more than the one that night. A single incident alone marred their pleasure, and even that had its ludicrous side.

"Look out, Mary, there's one of those yellow jackets that stung you this noon," said Mr. Davenport as the table was being cleared for dessert. "Gustus, try to drive it out."

Gustus, who was waiting on the table, had just removed an almost empty plate of honey, and, without stopping to set it down, picked up a duster with his free hand, and began chasing the wasp.

"You'd better look out, Gustus, it may sting you, and then you'll find it no laughing matter as you did when I was stung this noon."

"Were you stung, mamma, and did Gustus laugh?"

"Yes, Beth. I didn't tell you about it at the time because we didn't want you to know that Gustus was here."

Gustus stopped his wild chase a moment. His thick lips expanded into a great smile. "She

wuz powerful funny, Missy Beth. I jes' couldn't keep from laughin'."

"Gustus was the funny one, Beth," declared Marian, loyal to her mother. "Papa sent him out for some mud as it's good for a hornet's sting, and Gustus, after being gone the longest time, came back without any. He said he couldn't find any mud; he hadn't sense enough to know that dirt and water make mud."

To escape the laugh that followed, Gustus rushed from the room.

"I think he succeeded in getting the hornet out. It's nowhere around," said Mr. Davenport.

"Ow, ow, ow," yelled Gustus outside. Then he hopped back into the room, and danced round and round. Great tears rolled down his black face, and his thick upper lip was fast swelling to twice its size.

"It's judgment on me," he cried between his howls. "I jes' shouldn't have laughed at Miss Mary. I'll nebbeh, nebbeh, so long as I lib, laugh at any one in mis'ry agin. Ret'bution is sure to overtake one, de minister done tole us dat, an' I ought have known bettah dan to have laughed. Ow, ow!"

"It's honey that took the hornet to your lips. You shouldn't have licked the dish," admonished Mrs. Davenport.

He ceased his capers for a moment. "I 'clah to goodness dat ——"

"Gustus, be careful," warned Beth. "Your lips are sticky still, and it's worse to lie than it is to laugh."

He rolled his eyes tragically. "Well—well, Missy Beth, I don't jes' see how it did happen, but some way, 'foh I knowed it, dat dish did get up some disaccountable way right by my mouth, an' I did taste somethin' like honey. De dish wuz mos' empty anyhow."

Mrs. Davenport, from her own experience, knew that Gustus must really be suffering. "You've been punished sufficiently, I think, so that you'll not let dishes get up to your lips again, Gustus. Go down now and see if Maggie can suggest anything to help you. We'll wait a moment for the ice cream and cake."

While waiting, Beth propped her doll up beside her. The kitten had fallen asleep at the foot of the bed; the squirrel held undisputed sway under the bedclothes; the mocking-bird slept in its cage, and Duke was patiently waiting for Maggie to call him below for his supper. Beth smiled from sheer happiness.

"I have a pretty fine family now, haven't I? I don't believe any one has any nicer pets."

Marian looked toward her father who nodded his head as if giving her permission to say something.

"You have one pet, Beth, that you know nothing about. Ask papa about it."

Beth looked inquiringly toward her father. "Have you something for me, too?"

"Yes, dear," he assured her with a loving glance.

"Guess what it is, Beth," cried Marian and Harvey and Julia almost in the same breath. To their minds this was the great surprise of the evening.

Beth shook her head. "I can't guess. It seems to me I have everything in the world I want."

"You'll like it best of all. It will carry you up the mountains when you're well."

"Not a pony!" cried Beth, her heart thumping wildly.

"No, not a pony, but——" Mr. Davenport drew from his pocket a picture. "Well, you can see for yourself what it is. We couldn't bring it in to you, so I took a picture of it as Gustus was leading it home."

At first glance Beth was disappointed. A saucy, sturdy mule with ears flopped back was what she saw.

"In time I may grow to love you, but a pony would have been much nicer," was her first thought.

It was funny, but in the picture the mule seemed to be disgusted at the idea of her liking a pony, better than his fine, sturdy self. She even felt as if he was winking at her, and from

that moment, she loved her new possession. The very impudence of his bearing won her heart. She hardly knew how to thank her father, and so she made him come over to her and kissed him over and over again, murmuring, "Oh, you dear, good papa; you dear, good papa!"

"So you like him even before you know the reason why I bought a mule instead of a pony? A mule, being so sure footed, will carry you much more safely over the mountains."

Maggie now entered with the ice cream.

"How's Gustus?" asked Beth.

"I'se done 'im all up, an' yet he jes' keeps howlin' an' howlin', an' I can't noways stop 'im."

"Send him up here, and I'll give him a dish of cream. That'll stop him if anything will," declared Beth.

"You all coddle dat chile dreadful," muttered Maggie as she left the room. Ever since Gustus had been taken into the Davenport family, she had disciplined the colored boy, whereby he had profited greatly. She considered it her duty to appear more strict than she really was.

"Yoh all'll be sho to laugh," sobbed a muffled voice outside the door a moment later.

"We'll remember how retribution overtakes one and not laugh," promised Mr. Davenport.

The door opened very cautiously, and Gustus, more subdued than they had ever seen him, entered quietly. His mouth and one éye were

covered by a cloth tied in a bow-knot at the back of his woolly head. Nobody laughed, but Beth had to hide her head under the bedclothes to keep from it, and the others hardly dared look at him.

“Missy Beth, is yoh laughin’?”

She emerged from under the covers. “I wouldn’t laugh for the world, Gustus,” but a quiver about the corners of her mouth was not to be repressed.

Even Gustus indulged in a sickly smile. “I reckon I am powerful funny wid dis cloth, but it kinder ’stracts my ’tention. ’Stead ob feelin’ all mouth as I did, I feels all cloth. I jes’ couldn’t do widout it now.”

There was a merry twinkle in Beth’s eyes. “I suppose you couldn’t take it off even to eat a dish of ice cream.”

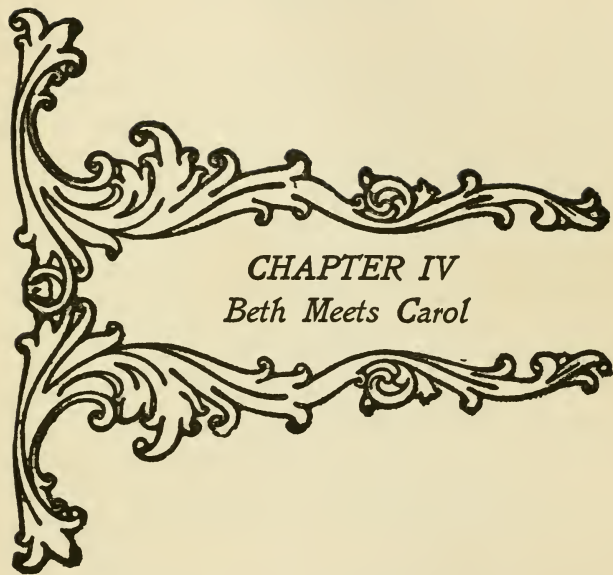
“Ice cream,” repeated Gustus, “ice cream? Dat’d ’stract my ’tention more’n any cloth in de world,” and with the words he loosened the bandage revealing his swollen lip. “Does I look moah funny now?”

Beth could not answer truthfully without hurting his feelings, so she said, “Don’t think about your lip, Gustus. Just take that plate of cream from papa, and think about that.”

This was pleasing advice to him. He chose a seat in the far corner of the room, and gradu-

ally, under the benign influence of the cream, content once more took possession of him.

“Missy Beth, if it hadn’t been foh dat imp ob darkness, dis’d been one ob de happiest days ob my life,” he muttered as the last drop of the cream trickled down his throat, “but I don’t even mind de pain now. I jes’ ’members how scrumptious it am to be wid yoh all. An’ I’ll be mighty careful not to laugh agin at nobody, foh if one laughs, it’s jes’ as de minister ’lowed, ret’bution’s sho to follow.”



CHAPTER IV
Beth Meets Carol

CHAPTER IV

Beth Meets Carol

ON the side porch in a hammock, Beth propped herself on her elbow for a better view of the mountains. The sun was shining, but clouds were settling over the tallest ridges while the blue haze was deepening. Seen thus the mountains were even grander than Beth had expected. She drew in a very deep breath, almost too happy for words in which to express her joy over being outdoors once more in such a grand world.

"I hope the clouds don't mean rain," exclaimed Marian, anxiously scanning the sky.

"Here comes Gustus," called Julia who had skipped down to the foot of the piazza steps. "He's bringing your mule for you to see."

The next instant Beth beheld her mule for the first time.

"Ain't he scrumptious, Missy Beth?" called Gustus, duly proud of the mule's glossy coat of brown that fairly glistened from much brushing. To make a good impression, Gustus switched the mule with a whip.

Not understanding the good intentions of Gustus, his lordship resented the indignity by letting fly a pair of hind heels which so surprised

Gustus that he almost loosened his hold on the mule. The next moment he chuckled.

"Ho, ho! He sairtainly am quick in his hinders, Missy Beth. I'd nebbeh trust my skin 'hind him."

"He didn't like your whipping him for nothing," answered Beth reprovingly.

"He done must have some style 'bout him," muttered Gustus, giving his charge another sly cut with the whip. This time the mule not only let his heels fly, but nipped viciously at Gustus who had to dodge to escape the animal's sharp teeth.

"Gustus, you mustn't treat my mule that way," said Beth. Then after a moment she added, "What's his name?"

He ran his fingers through his woolly locks. "Ain't no name dat I knows of. Reckon yo'll have to give 'im one, Missy Beth."

"How would Kicker do?" inquired Harvey who had come out in time to witness the mule's acrobatic ability.

"It wasn't his fault. I'll not have my mule slandered," cried Beth.

"He knows how to kick anyway. I think Kicker a good name," persisted Harvey as much to tease as in earnest.

"And if you didn't want people to know your meaning, you might call him Rueur," proposed Marian, who was studying French. "Just the

other day, I read in a story of a 'mulet rueur' and found that it meant a kicking mule."

"I rather like the name, and have half a mind to call him—what did you say kicker was in French, Marian?"

"Rueur."

"So you agree, Beth, that Rueur is a kicker?" questioned Harvey in hopes of making her eyes flash.

"I didn't really say I'd name him Rueur, but if I do, it's not for the reason you think."

"Why is Rueur—the name seems to have fastened upon his muleship already—why do you call him Rueur then?" He fully expected one of her quaint conceits, and was not disappointed.

"I call him Rueur—he really is named now—because he is to carry me all around the country and perchance we'll come across strange adventures together." She was garbing her ideas in the manner of the legends that had been read her during her imprisonment. "And then always at the right moment my Knight Rueur is to kick at the wrong, but never at the right." When she saw that her friends were smiling over her conceit, she added, "Well it was at the wrong he did kick just now. You can't deny it, and I'll wager I know Knight Rueur's character better than you do. I wish I could go forth on Rueur this very minute."

Harvey and Marian exchanged glances by

which means Beth knew there was something unusual in the air.

"What are you two up to?"

"If you don't mind, Beth, Harvey and I are going out riding this afternoon," answered Marian slightly hesitating.

Beth looked perplexed. "Not both of you on Rueur?"

"No, indeed. Papa bought two fine saddle horses. He and mamma both expect to ride. Everybody does up here. I'm going to tease papa to buy me a mule."

"You can ride Rueur whenever you want, Marian." Try as hard as she would a lump would rise in her throat so that her voice showed her emotion.

"If you mind, we'll stay home," offered Harvey.

"No, no, you must go," she answered, gulping down the disquieting lump. "It's only that I want to ride so much myself, but your staying home wouldn't let me go."

"I'm to stay with you, Beth," said Julia.

For a moment Beth had a struggle to be unselfish. The afternoon without any of them did loom up rather forlorn, and she believed that she and Julia together could have a fine time; but, judging by herself, she knew that Julia would much rather ride, so she said resolutely:

"Julia, you must go with Marian and Harvey.

You shall ride Rueur. No, I'll not listen to a word. Go and get ready this minute. I'm queen, you know, and must be obeyed. Bring my squirrel back to keep me company, and I want to see you start."

Not to spoil their pleasure, she appeared smiling before them even when they were all mounted ready for the departure.

"One, two, three—go," called Beth, perhaps a little tremulously.

Marian and Harvey lightly touched their steeds with their whips and away they started. Julia likewise whipped Rueur, whereupon back on his haunches settled the stubborn mule. Julia struck harder, which only made Rueur flap his ears in an impudent manner as much as to say, "I'm too big to mind a little girl like you."

"Perhaps if Harvey starts with you, Rueur will do better," suggested Beth ashamed of the behavior of her mule.

But the minute the horse approached the mule, his lordship began to kick, whereupon the horse bit at Rueur, while both animals flopped back their ears in an angry manner.

"I—I don't like mules," murmured Julia.

"We'll change," proposed Harvey, and although Julia hated to acknowledge herself defeated, she was only too glad to escape from a kicking mule. So in a few moments she was upon the horse while Harvey mounted the mule.

Still Rueur refused to budge. Whipping had no effect, although Harvey was so disgusted that he lashed the stubborn animal vigorously.

Gustus, alone, was amused over the situation. He laughed until the tears rolled down his face, but Beth disapproved of his mirth.

"I'm ashamed of you, Gustus. It's silly to laugh."

He suddenly sobered. "I know what dat stubborn Mr. Mule needs. Massa Harve, yoh wait a second till I come back," he called running into the house.

As there was small likelihood of Harvey's being able to start, he ceased from his efforts and waited to see what Gustus would offer.

"It's horrid to be so stubborn. I'll never be stubborn again," Beth said to herself.

In a moment Gustus returned dangling a pair of spurs.

"Ha, ha," he chuckled. "Wid dese, Mr. Mule, you'll be as meek as Moses."

So it proved. One touch of the spurs to Rueur's hide, and away he galloped setting the horses a lively pace. Gustus ran down the pine road to watch the riders as long as possible.

Beth could not repress a sigh. Pensively she gazed at the chained squirrel sleeping in the hammock beside her. In a moment it awakened, trying to sit up, but was entangled by the chain.

"You poor little thing, you don't like being a

captive any better than I do. I've half a mind to let you go. I'd miss you, but——"

She looked out at the pine trees, noting in particular one whose limbs touched the side of the piazza rail.

"First you'd spring up that branch. Perhaps you'd pause a moment to let me know how happy you were to be free. Then on and on you'd bound, oh, so joyously. Maybe you'd find a playmate." At that moment a human playmate was what Beth desired above all else in the world, so she judged the squirrel's desire for happiness by her own.

Without further consideration, she slipped the collar from the small captive's neck. In an instant it sprang toward the railing as Beth had foreseen. Immediately repenting of her kindly impulse, Beth reached out to recapture the squirrel, but already it was beyond her grasp, having nimbly climbed up into the tree. It paused as she had speculated and, cocking its head, eyed her reproachfully, seeming to say:

"Even if you are sorry, I thank you," and then was off like a flash.

"Gustus, come here," cried Beth in distress.

For a wonder he came running in answer.

"Gustus, see my squirrel up there? If you catch it, I'll give you a quarter."

His eyes grew big at the offer. "Yoh ain't 'ceivin' me?"

Assured that she was in earnest, he darted away in pursuit.

"Yer warn't peart-like to let hit go. Squirrels be powerful nimble," announced a voice below, so unexpectedly that Beth jumped.

No human being but Gustus, fast disappearing down the hill below, was in sight.

"Hit'll starve to death," continued the voice. "Thar hain't any nuts now, an' hit hain't any stored up like hit had been wild always."

The unknown one's words made Beth uneasy, although at the moment curiosity was the uppermost feeling with her.

"Who are you, anyway? And where are you?"

"I'm Carol," and out from under the porch the mountain girl emerged.

"Carol?" repeated Beth. The name sounded familiar but she was unable for the moment to remember where she had heard it.

"I'm called Carol now, though I wuz named Ca'line 'cause I wuz born in Ca'lina. Then a lady she called me Carol 'cause I wuz always likin' to sing. Maw sometimes calls me Cal."

Beth was not paying much attention to the explanation. She was studying out where she had heard the name.

"Oh, I know now!" she exclaimed suddenly. "You're the girl who told Maggie about the accident the night I was hurt. She told me about you."

Carol smiled. At first Beth had not thought her at all good looking, but with a smile her face lighted up so remarkably that Beth was inclined to change her opinion.

"You're not like what I expected from what Maggie said about you," said Beth.

"Yer looks jes' like what I 'spected, only sweeter like," announced Carol, and then suddenly grew bashful. Not daring to raise her blue eyes, much as she wished to do so, she twined her fingers in and out in nervous agitation.

"My name is Beth—or rather Elizabeth Davenport." This information was tendered by Beth to relieve Carol's embarrassment.

Once more Carol smiled, which confirmed Beth in her thought that a smile did wonders for the rather wizened face before her.

"We uns knowed all 'bout yer." Once her tongue was loosened she found delight in telling things to Beth. "Day after day, I've hung 'round hopin' to see yer. I felt ter'ble 'bout the accident, an' when I seen yer out to-day, I wuz that joyful that I wuz full of song here," pressing her heart. "I wanted ter go an' pick flowers fer yer, but I had to tell yer first how joyful I am."

Such enthusiasm surprised but pleased Beth.

"You are very good to be so interested," she answered. "Where do you live?"

"We're neighbors. I live yonder in the holler, on yer paw's land. My paw worked on shares

one while, but we uns don't have to work now. We uns is very rich."

In undisguised curiosity Beth eyed Carol. The mountain girl was very queerly dressed for a rich person. In fact her clothes were so very old that they were almost ragged, and she was barefooted.

"A rich girl might go barefooted. I've done so myself," thought Beth, "but she'd surely dress better."

Carol read her thoughts. For a moment she appeared ashamed, and then she tossed her head almost haughtily.

"Our money's tied up in the courts now, but I'm goin' to have silks an' satins later."

"Oh," but Beth was not much enlightened. She would have liked to question Carol if she had considered it polite. She was really growing interested in the quaint character before her.

"I'd like to have you spend the afternoon with me," she said. "If you don't, I'll be all alone. Mamma thinks Julia's with me so she'll not hurry home. Can't you stay?"

Carol nodded her head and seated herself on the topmost step near the hammock. She wound her arms, much too long and lanky for her figure, around her knees, and in this attitude gazed up at Beth. Again she smiled and a light came into her eyes that won Beth's heart.

"I'm goin' to love yer heaps. I love yer al-

ready," she murmured. "Yer don't mind if I tell yer things? I've no one else to talk to."

During the last weeks Beth herself had felt lonely many times in spite of the great love that had been lavished upon her, and Carol's craving for companionship appealed to her. "I'd like to have you tell me things," she answered.

"We uns lived in Al'bama onct, an' grandpaw stayed thar when we uns cum back to the mountains to live, an' hit's through him stayin' thar, we're to hev money. We're to hev heaps an' heaps. More'n yer, I reckon. We're to be very rich folks, an' I'm to take singin' lessons."

"Oh," exclaimed Beth for the second time. Then, ashamed of her monosyllables, she asked, "Do you want to take singing lessons?"

Carol clasped her hands impulsively. "Want to take um?" she murmured. "Oh, I want to take um so much I can't tell yer how much."

"Do you really like singing?" questioned Beth in surprise. She was even more surprised to note how the mountain girl's face lighted up at the question.

"I hain't never hearn much singin' 'cept the birds', but I like better'n anythin' to think how singin' should be. I try an' try till I get a song the way hit seems hit should be."

"Do you really sing that way?" Beth asked almost incredulously.

The radiant expression faded from Carol's

face. "I 'lows that what I sing don't 'mount to much like I'd like, but if I had lessons maybe hit would. Do yer reckon so?"

"Maybe." For some reason Beth had little faith in her new friend's singing ability and hastened to change the subject. "I'd love to go to the top of that mountain. Have you ever been up there?" She looked toward Hogback.

"What, Hogback thar?" Carol's tones were contemptuous and her thumb once more went over her shoulder. "Why, when we uns first cum that's whar we went, 'way up thar, an' I don't hanker at all to go back. I had to tote vegetables miles an' miles to earn a few pennies to keep us from bein' without any clothes. I tell yer I grew so powerful tired of trudgin' up an' down that thar mountain that I don't never want to see hit no more. I can't believe yer'd like to go up jes' fer pleasure, but if yer really mean hit, I'll show yer all 'round up thar some day. Perhaps yer'd like to see the spot whar Brune killed the wildcat that wuz after me."

"A wildcat?" repeated Beth, fearing that Carol might be—well, not exactly truthful. Then she added, "Who's Brune?"

"Him? Why, Brune's my dawg. Here, Brune!" she called. "He's sure to come in a minute. He's never 'far off. Him's too perlite to come without bein' called. Come on, Brune."

A beautiful hunting dog came bounding around the corner of the house.

"Why, what a fine dog," exclaimed Beth surprised that Carol owned anything so aristocratic.

Carol looked pleased. "Brune's rale peart-like, all right."

Beth coaxed the dog to her side and stroked his silky head. "How did you come to get him?" she asked.

"Onct, when we uns lived up thar," again her thumb pointed to the mountain back of her, "a hunter man 'lowed as how he must stay all night with we uns. Hit war a powerful stormy night. The rain—wal, thar war no drops, but hit cum in such floods that I didn't 'low but as how our cabin with we uns in hit mought be washed down the mountain."

"Do they have storms like that up here?"

Carol giggled. "Wal, I should say! Why, the clouds let go all to onct, an' down comes the water like as bucketfuls war bein' poured down yer back."

"I should love to see a storm like that," cried Beth.

Carol looked over her shoulder at the fast-gathering clouds along the mountain tops. "Peers like to me you'll have yer wish right soon."

"Goody," cried Beth, but the next instant her

face grew serious. "I hope they will get back before it storms."

"So do I." Carol was more anxious than Beth about the riders. She knew only too well the nature of these mountain storms. Her mind pictured the children riding along the slippery clay roads. She saw the swollen streams and the terrifying lightning that brought into bold prominence the jutting rocks and dark ravines, and she wondered what the children would do if they were caught out in the coming storm.

Beth's thought reverted to the story.

"Go on about how Brune came to you. The hunter—did he stay all night at your house?"

"Yes, though paw didn't 'low as how he'd better, he 'lowed as how he must."

"Why didn't your father want him to stay?"

Carol eyed Beth wistfully. "I reckon as how hit don't be no matter now to paw if I do tell, only I want yer to think well of me, an' yer won't. But ye're sure to hear 'bout us, so I mought as well tell myself." She hesitated, hanging her head. "Did yer ever hear of mountain dew?"

Beth shook her head, and Carol looked relieved.

"Hit's somethin' yer need a license fer, an' paw had none, an' he 'lowed as how the hunter man mought find hit out, but as hit war stormin' so powerful hard an' the hunter man offered a sight of money, paw let him stay. You see we

uns needed money dreadful them days fer hit war pretty hard pickin', an' even lately hit's been hard pickin', so hard that I've toted water up from the spring to earn pennies. We haven't any to spend now, though after while we're to have more money than I kin count, an' I don't reckon even yer could count hit all."

"Oh," Beth began to think the exclamation would grow habitual with her if Carol continued to talk of their wealth. "She will persist in having riches. I wonder if there isn't some truth in what she's telling. She surely couldn't be so untruthful," thought Beth.

Happily unconscious of the doubts her statements created, Carol continued, "We uns—my brothers and sisters ——"

"How many have you?" Beth interrupted.

Carol looked troubled. "Thar's Pete an' Joe an' Melinda an' Mary an' Martha an' Hezekiah an' little Sampson. How many is that?"

"Seven."

"An' I'm eight. Thar's more of us than that 'sides what died. Let me see," she held up her fingers to count on. "Pete an' Joe are two."

"Never mind counting them." Beth did not marvel that Carol had trouble in keeping count of such a large family. "Go on about Brune."

Carol shifted her position and leaning up against a column clasped her hands back of her neck. She looked at Brune who had settled

down on the ground at her feet. Her eyes expressed her intense love, and even her voice softened.

"He's pearter-like than any kid I know. He hain't no fear at all. Why, I reckon as how he'd tackle a bar if he had any call."

"A bar?" repeated Beth, thinking of a piece of iron.

"Yes, a bar. Hain't yer never seen a bar? Thar hain't no bars here 'bouts, but they're ter'ble wild animals."

"Oh, a bear. Well, go on about Brune."

Beth was so interested about the wildcat and Brune that she had forgotten all about her squirrel.

"Whar wuz I? Oh, 'bout the hunter man. We littler ones didn't know 'bout him stayin' all night 'til the next mornin'. Then I found out by seein' Brune outdoors when I went fer water. I liked him from the moment I sot eyes on him, an' he liked me. The hunter man wuz tired an' slept rale late. I had to go down with some things to sell that air day, an' Brune started to follow. I tell yer, hit war lonesome travelin' miles an' miles on foot all by myself, an' so I kinder 'low as how I mought have coaxed him some. Didn't peer like hit'd do no harm. Yer see, I didn't know that that air hunter man had planned he must cotch er train North, an' when hit came time to go he couldn't nowhar find

Brune, an' so he went without him. Said as how he'd come back some time fer him, but I'm pow'ful glad I've never laid eyes on him since. I'd feel ter'ble bad to part with Brune."

Beth readily understood how this could be. "I shouldn't think the 'hunter man' would have gone without him. He looks to me like a valuable dog."

"Oh, the hunter man had heaps of other dawgs. Paw said as how he had funnels."

Beth puzzled her head to solve the meaning of funnels, but could not. "What are funnels?"

"Funnels? Don't yer know? I 'lowed as how yer'd know everythin'. Why, funnels are whar rich men keep dawgs an' raise um."

"Oh, you mean kennels." To keep from laughing, Beth hurriedly inquired, "Didn't Brune miss his master at first?"

"Miss him?" the mountain girl repeated half disdainfully, half jealously. "Brune, come here. Yer liked me better'n him from the very firs', didn't yer?"

The instant she called, the dog arose and walked majestically up to her, placing a cold nose against the hand held out to him. Carol turned triumphantly to Beth.

"Yer see. An' look, here air the scars I tole yer 'bout. Hit's whar the wildcat clawed Brune."

All over Brune's head and neck were scars, and Beth eyed them in astonishment. Until this

moment her faith as to there having been any wildcat adventure had been small.

"And there are really, truly wildcats in the mountains!" she exclaimed eagerly, her eyes very big and bright in wonder.

"Yer didn't believe me, did yer?" Then, when she saw Beth's cheeks crimson, she hastened on. "Yer want to know if thar air wildcats up here? Wal, if one tuk after yer, an' yer 'lowed as every minute'd be yer last, yer'd know thar wuz without askin'."

"And one really got after you that way? I—I"—stammered Beth, noting a hurt look on Carol's face, "I don't doubt your word, but you see I'm not used to thinking of wild animals except in circuses and out at the park; so you mustn't mind if I'm surprised. Please go on."

Pacified by her apology and interest, Carol was very willing to continue. "I'd hearn the men say as how sometimes thar war wildcats 'bout, but I scarcely believed um, like yer didn't me."

Again Beth blushed guiltily, but she was thinking at the same time, "What fun it'll be to tell Harvey and the girls about Carol and the wildcat."

"An' 'cause I wuz careless goin' whar hit war wild all by myself, I wuz most killed. If hit hadn't been for Brune, I'd have been killed as sure's my name's Carol."

Beth's eyes were growing rounder every minute. She almost held her breath in order to catch every word. "I'm so interested," she murmured as Carol paused a moment. "Do go on."

"I don't jes' remember why Brune warn't with me at first. Most likely he wuz off chasin' somethin'. He very often is. I wuz walkin' through the woods never onct thinkin' 'bout wildcats, but jes' 'lowed as how I must hurry home 'cause hit wuz suddently grown dark, an' then—all to onct—I seen two balls of fire right 'head of me, what knocked the sense clean out of me. I didn't move or screech. I jes' stood still, an' that wild thing stood still an' glared, an' glared. Say, wouldn't yer have been scared?"

"Well I should say so." Beth was pale at the very thought, and she shuddered slightly. Carol enjoyed the effect her story was producing and wished to prolong it as much as possible.

"What'd yer have done in my place with those awful balls of fire blazin' right into yer?"

Beth considered a moment. "If I couldn't run, I'd have called Duke."

"Who's him? Yer dawg? Well, that's jes' what I did. I called Brune, didn't I, Brune?" He was still beside her and she paused to stroke his neck where the scars showed the ugliest. "If hit hadn't been fer yer, Brune, my own neck'd been like that only much worsen 'cause I couldn't

have fit like yer. An' yer wouldn't have had me here this minute to love yer like I do."

"Did he come as soon as you called?" Beth was impatient of any interruption at such a critical point.

"He must 'ave scented danger even 'fore I called." As she spoke, her hand still rested lovingly on the healed wounds, and Brune looked up into her face as if he knew she was sounding his praise. He wagged his tail proudly. His mistress again let her attention stray to him. "Yer'll never forget that moment, will yer, Brune? I don't see even yet how yer dared face them balls of fire fer me."

Beth began to fear that she would never hear the whole story, but she really admired Carol's devotion to Brune because of her own liking for dogs. Therefore, she did not give way to her impatience, but said gently, "Please go on, Carol."

"Fust thing I knowed, he jumped out of ther bushes with his back all up—'most 'fore I'd called. He sprang right toward the balls of fire, an' jes' pitched right in an' fit. Yes, fit so hard that that thar wildcat almost killed him. I hearn him groan onct or twict quiet-like, fer he wuz too busy to think of his own pain. I wuz still numb with fear an' all I could do wuz to watch with my heart ready to fall out. I reckon if that wildcat had killed him, I'd have jes' stood

right thar 'til hit killed me too. Hit seemed as if I must stay. All to onct that thar wildcat got Brune down, an' fer a moment things grew black fer me. Folks like me don't faint, but I reckon I came as near hit as I ever will in my life. But when thar seemed no hope for Brune, fear for my dawg's life loosed my throat an' I screamed an' screamed 'til paw hearn, an' came with a gun, an' that wuz the last of wildcat. An' I fell down beside Brune an' cried an' cried, fer I reckon'd as how he wuz done fer. But he wuzn't, an' I nursed him 'til he wuz well."

Carol arose. "Wal, I reckon as how Brune an' me must be goin'. Maw'll kinder be wonderin'."

Beth held out her hand, and her eyes still shone. "I'm so glad you came. I'm very much obliged for telling me about the wildcat. You'll come again, won't you?"

"I liked bein' here better'n yer could guess, an' me an' Brune'll surely come agin."

Left to herself, Beth began to think that it was about time for the horseback riders to return. "They promised not to be gone long," she thought.

She looked toward the mountains. In the direction of Tremont there was no peak now visible, but instead, one mass of dark, angry clouds. Carol's description came back to trouble Beth.

"The clouds let go all to onct an' down comes the water like as bucketfuls war bein' poured down yer back."

"Yer lazy, no count boy!" The voice was unmistakably Carol's down in the pine grove at the foot of the hill. "Warn't yer tole to hunt squirrel, an' here yer be sleepin'. She'll scold yer."

"Missy Beth won't scole me. I jes' couldn't cotch dat squirrel no-away. De fastah I flew aftah it, de fastah flew Mr. Squirrel. I got awful tired, clean tuckered out, an' I was goin' to tole missy so, but ——"

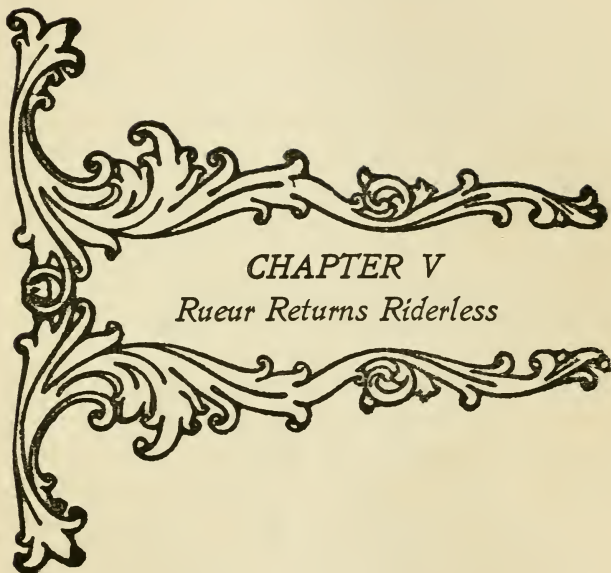
"Gustus, come here to me," called Beth.

"Thar, what I done tole yer? Yer goin' to cotch hit."

Beth was surprised that she could hear every word so distinctly considering the distance.

"Gustus, hurry," she called presently.

At the same moment her mother appeared through the open French window. "We must get you in, Beth. I hastened home when I saw the storm coming."



CHAPTER V

Rueur Returns Riderless



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Rueur Returns Riderless

ONCE in her own room, the storm fully occupied Beth's mind. Even after it grew very dark, she would not have a lamp lighted. The shades to the French windows were up and the awful wind that had come with the storm dashed the torrent of rain against the glass, blurring it except when the lightning overcame the darkness momentarily.

Built as the house was on the side of the hill, without a cellar, the wind had full sweep in the wing of the house where Beth was and the room shook and swayed to such an extent that Beth was somewhat nervous on her own account.

"It's like a cradle," she thought, as she sat propped up in bed. "I didn't know a house could shake so. Suppose it tumbled over."

A sudden flash of light made her forget her own fear in anxiety for the wanderers.

"What can have happened? They'll be awfully frightened and wet. Perhaps they've stopped somewhere. That's it."

Comforted somewhat by this hope, Beth again thought over her meeting with Carol.

"It turned out true about the wildcat, and

maybe she's really to have money. 'More'n yer have.' That's just what she said. If ——"

The door leading into the hall was hastily swung open, and Gustus burst into the room.

"Missy Beth, what yo' think?"

Her heart beat excitedly. "Have they come, Gustus?" she asked.

"Does yo' 'specs, Missy Beth, dat ——"

"Gustus, tell me. Have they come?"

"No 'deed, Missy Beth. What done make yo' think dat? But yo' squirrel done come back."

She was less pleased over the news than she would have been under ordinary circumstances, and her lack of enthusiasm disappointed Gustus. He eyed her reproachfully.

"Ain't I to earn dat quartah, 'cause I wuz de fust to see Mr. Squirrel? I cotched him after all."

"I suppose you put salt on its tail. No? Well how did you catch it?"

He stood first on one foot and then on the other, contriving how he might get the money. "I really cotched it, Missy Beth, an' yo' said if I did dat I wuz to have a quartah. I needs dat money ——" Conscience suddenly got the better of his greed. "Mr. Squirrel must 'ave known it too, or why should he 'ave come into de dinin' room jes' at supper time, an' hop up on his little hind feet an' beg? I fooled him, though 'bout

me bein' black. I cracked some nuts fer 'im, an' while Mr. Squirrel wuz gobblin' dem up, I grabbed 'im. Yo' see de nuts 'stracted his 'tention from me. Don't yo' reckon I earned dat quartah?"

He looked so very wistful that Beth could not resist. "I'll get papa to give it to you."

Around the room he danced in high delight.

"Golly, but I'm happy. Heaps of good things happenin'. When we went to de woods early dis mornin', me an' Duke treed a possum. I'm dat happy ——"

Suddenly a flash of lightning and the crash that quickly followed frightened all the delight out of him. Midway in the room he halted, shaking until even his teeth chattered.

"Ow! ow! Missy Beth. I—I didn't tole yo' a lie? I—I let yo' know dat Mr. Squirrel gave hisself up, didn't I? I don't wants to be killed by the lightnin'. It wuz so ter'ble, it might strike one dead."

"And they're out in it," murmured Beth.

"Yo' don't reckon it killed um, do yo'?"

"Gustus, don't be silly."

Her tone was so sharp that it made Gustus shiver anew. "No, I won't, Missy Beth, dough I'se ter'ble scared."

The fire was dying down and the room was growing cold.

"Bring in some logs, Gustus. We must have

the room nice and warm for them when they return."

But even after the fire blazed up, Beth was but little comforted.

"You keep a good watch, Gustus, and the minute you see a sign of them, you run up and tell me."

After he had gone, she was almost sorry she had sent him. She would have rung the bell for some one but supposed that supper was being served. In this, she was mistaken. Her parents were too anxious to eat, and stayed away from her that she might not question them.

All alone, Beth was more and more terrified by the violence of the wind. In fact it was increasing in velocity momentarily. So distressed was she by its howling that she drew the bed-clothes over her head to shut out the sound if she could; but she found no relief thus. Unable to stand the suspense alone another moment, she reached out and struck the bell by her bedside.

Her father answered the call.

"Oh, papa," she half sobbed, "I'm so worried. The wind frightens me. Wouldn't it be awful if they're out in it? Do you suppose they've gone in somewhere?"

"I hope so, dear."

"Papa, what was that? It sounded like Gustus yelling."

Mr. Davenport, too, had heard the same sound

and he hurried over toward the window. Beth's every nerve was quivering, and the crash of thunder that came at that moment made her think that perhaps her imagination was leading her astray.

As the thunder subsided, Mr. Davenport threw open the window at which he stood. The wind was driving the rain against the opposite side of the house so that only the sound of the storm entered through the open window, at least that was all Beth heard at first; but in a moment another uproar almost made her heart stop beating. Again she was sure Gustus was yelling, but what was even more terrifying was another crying out, so very peculiar that Beth had not the least idea what it could be.

"Oh, papa, what's the matter?" she cried as he closed the window and turned toward the door. "Did you hear the noise? What was it?"

He paused momentarily. "It's probably some of Gustus's tomfoolery. Don't worry, Beth. I'll find out all about it in a moment."

"Be sure to let me know," she called after him.

She felt her helplessness more than ever because she could not run along with him. To lie still and wait to be told was very hard. Although she was only kept in suspense a few moments, the time seemed an age to her.

"Oh, Missy Beth!" cried Gustus, rushing into the room.

"Have they come?" she demanded, raising herself on her elbow.

He was panting and only gasped, "Oh, Missy Beth—oh——"

His manner caused a clutching at her heart. Something terrible had happened to the riders and he hated to tell. Impatient that he kept her in such suspense, she still dreaded to have him speak.

He rolled his eyes tragically. "De awfullest thing's happened——" He drew a deep breath. He was intent on impressing her duly, but hardly realized what a harrowing effect his manner and words were producing.

"They—they——?" She was almost sobbing.

"Did yo' hear dat awful, ter'ble noise? It made de cole run up an' down my back. I 'lowed dat Massa Harve an' Miss Marian an' Miss Julie were bein' murdered."

Speech was beyond Beth, but she shuddered. If she could have laid hands on him she would have shaken the truth from him instead of letting him torture her.

"Dat's jes' de way I felt," he continued admiringly. "I 'lowed——"

This was too much, and anger gave her back the use of her voice.

"I'll not listen to what you thought. Tell me this instant what happened."

He looked grieved. "Dat's jes' what I'm doin'. As dem chills war runnin' up an' down my back, de fright got in my mouth an' I yelled. Did yo' hear me yell?"

Beth knew that the more she interrupted, the longer she would be in hearing what had happened. That was always Gustus's way in telling anything. To control herself, she clasped her hands and pressed them together so hard that it actually hurt.

"Papa heard you," she answered faintly.

"Dat's why he came runnin'. If he hadn't come, I'd nebber dared see what wuz makin' dat awful, dreadful noise." His tones were sepulchral.

"What was it?" She was so harrowed that she was on the point of giving way to her feelings.

"What yo' reckon it wuz?"

"How should I know?" she snapped. Beth thought that now he must tell and she no longer curbed her impatience. "If I knew, I wouldn't be questioning you."

"Dat's so, Missy Beth. I nebber onct thought ob dat," he chuckled which enraged her anew. "How should yo' know 'bout dat noise when yo' couldn't guess if yo' tried all night."

"I'm not going to guess. If you don't tell

this minute, I'll have mamma send you back to Jacksonville," her voice was broken now by sobs.

"Why, Missy Beth, I am tellin' yo'," he stammered. "A hog, a monster hog made all dat noise."

"A hog?" she repeated, hardly believing what she heard. "And it had nothing to do about the riders at all?"

"Ob course not. Didn't yo' know dat all 'long?"

"Oh, Gustus, what a scare you gave me." Beth sank back on the pillow greatly relieved although still angry.

"I done give myself an awful scare, Missy Beth," he answered in a sympathetic tone as if he had nothing to do with the state of her feelings. All at once he burst forth into a hearty, contagious laugh. Angry as Beth was she almost had to smile. Then it came to her that perhaps he was making fun of her.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she said in her most dignified manner.

"Ha ha, ho ho, Missy Beth, yo' didn't see dat hog or yo'd laugh too." He suddenly sobered. "But it et up ebbery one ob our chickens dat we had cooped up to eat oursels."

"Ate up our chickens? Hogs don't eat chickens."

"Dis Mr. Hog did. He got right into de coop wid dem an' gobbled up ebbery one. Den piggy hog wanted to go, but he stuck."

The ludicrousness of the situation again struck him. He laughed so heartily that the tears trickled down his cheeks, and he doubled over with his hands on his sides.

"Oh, oh, Missy Beth," he half sobbed, "yo'—oh, oh—nebber sawed anythin' half so funny. It wriggled, an' wriggled, ah, ah, but it couldn't budge, an' then it squealed an' squealed, jes' dis-away." He grunted in such perfect imitation that Beth just had to laugh.

"Ho, ho," he roared much easier in mind now that she was no longer stern. "Mr. Hog's still stickin' in de coop. Don't yo' hear him squealin'? I do. Serve yo' right, Mr. Hog." So great was his glee that he could hardly keep from dancing.

Mrs. Davenport entered with a tray. "We almost forgot your supper, Beth," she said.

"I can't eat. I'm ——"

"Yes you can, dear. You mustn't worry. They'll come home all right." She arranged Beth's supper on the pillow in front of her and started to light the lamp.

"I don't want a light, mamma. The fire makes it bright enough."

"Very well, dear. Gustus, you can stay to wait on her if she wants anything else."

He was very much delighted that he was not to be banished. After Mrs. Davenport left, he skipped over by the fire, and sat down on the hearth with his back to the flames. At the same

moment an extra heavy gust of wind shook the house to its very foundations.

"Ow," howled Gustus, jumping up and running back to the bedside. "When de wind shrieks dataway, Missy Beth, it means dat somethin' ter'ble 'll happen. I'm awful scared."

"Don't whisper that way, Gustus. You're worse than the wind."

"Does yo' believe in signs?" he asked as he dropped into the chair nearest her while nodding his head impressively. "I've been studyin' 'bout it an' it peers like to me dat it's very bad to hav' a squirrel come back like yo's did. Rabbits are bad luck an' I reckon squirrels am too. An' dat hog, also, may mean somethin' very bad."

"Oh, you're silly now," but, though she appeared contemptuous, her power to eat was being taken away entirely by his doleful manner.

"I ain't silly, Missy Beth. Signs nebber fail. Ow," he howled again in unison with the wind. "Jes' listen to dat now. All de people who have been killed on nights like dis am let loose an' dey howl to let us know how fearful it am to be out dis night. I wouldn't be out dar fer all de world."

"Hush, Gustus, hush." She was thinking of the riders.

"Ghosts chase people on sech nights." His voice was again sepulchral. "Dey come gallopin' down de mountains on wind horses—hear dem

now—ow, ow, ow, dey shriek, an' clutch folks, an' take dem off foreber. Supposin' dey cotch our folks? Whatebber would we do?"

"Nonsense. I'm not afraid of ghosts, but I do hope they're not in this awful storm. That's what scares me."

"Yo' ain't eatin' nothin'," interrupted Gustus, eyeing enviously the tray with all its dainties.

"I can't eat. You can have everything here."

His eyes fairly bulged out in his pleasure. He grasped the tray hastily as if fearful she might repent, and set to work with unimpaired appetite to devour his unexpected feast. In his greed he even forgot his fear. His mournfulness all departed, but the effects of it still remained with Beth. It seemed an interminable time until her father and mother came up-stairs. Every moment made them more and more anxious, but for Beth's sake they tried to appear cheerful.

"Oh, is there nothing we can do?" cried Beth.

"We don't even know where they were going."

They talked awhile of other matters, but their thoughts dwelt with the wanderers.

"What time is it?" asked Beth.

"Eight o'clock."

"Only eight? I thought it must be about midnight."

Half an hour later there was a timid knock at the door, and Beth was greatly surprised to see

Carol enter the room. She was dripping wet and looked as if she had been out in the worst of the storm. She was without hat or wrap and her teeth chattered from cold.

"Why, Carol!" exclaimed Beth.

If Beth had been alone, Carol would have spoken immediately, so important was the news she had to tell, but, at sight of the others, speech failed her, so that she stood stupidly twisting her hands with her eyes lowered.

"Carol, what brought you out in such a storm?" questioned Beth.

Tears rose in Carol's eyes, and she found courage to sidle nearer.

"The folks that rode?" she gasped. "Hav' they come?"

"No, no. You've something to tell about them?"

Carol nodded her head. Then she blurted out: "One of um is hurted then or killed like I feared."

Beth sprang up in bed unmindful of weakness.

"What makes you say that?" demanded Mr. Davenport grasping Carol by the shoulders.

She gulped down a sob. "I—I rode all the ways from Landrums to tell yer."

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"My paw's the man what got the mule fer you uns from a man at Landrums. I ——"

"Has this anything to do with our children?"

She glanced shyly up at him and nodded her

head. "I wuz down spendin' er night with that man's gal. An'——" Again her voice failed her.

"Do go on, Carol," implored Beth.

"Mebbe hit's not as bad as hit seems. I hates to hurt yer," sobbed Carol. "But hit's got to be tole, hasn't hit?" She looked up pleadingly at Mr. Davenport. Not waiting for an answer she continued brokenly:

"'Bout half an hour or so ago, they found yer mule with hit's bridle all broken, an' no one in the saddle. The man wouldn't come to tole yer, so I come."

Her bravery in riding through dark and storm to bring the news was overlooked because of their anxiety.

"Harvey's killed," sobbed Beth.

"I'm going to Landrums. I must get trace of the children," said Mr. Davenport.

"If yer want the mule, he's hitched 'round by the kitchen."

To save time, he decided to ride the mule.

Once in the saddle, Mr. Davenport urged Rueur into a gallop, and so persistently persuaded him onward, that tired as the mule was, he was compelled to travel swiftly over the slippery clay and the sure-footed little beast never stumbled nor halted.

The storm was lifting, but Mr. Davenport had little thought for the state of the weather.

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CHAPTER VI
The Deserted Cabin

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The Deserted Cabin

AND now to tell what had befallen the riders earlier in the day.

The spurs had such a good effect on the mule that the animals traveled peaceably for a mile or two at a moderate pace; but the youthful blood of the riders, and the bracing air made them impatient of such quiet sport.

"Let's pretend we're Indians," proposed Harvey with a whoop that slightly startled the girls.

Julia, too, had been pondering what she could propose for excitement and quickly seconded his effort.

"Or how would it do to be cowboys and ride like they do in the Wild West shows? Oh, and we could be chased by Indians!" exclaimed Julia.

"That would be sport. Come on," and Harvey, digging the spurs into Rueur, let forth another wild whoop that set the hills echoing.

Even quiet Marian entered into the spirit of the play.

"Nobody will hear," she thought and up she

rose in her stirrup, waving her whip and whooping with Harvey.

Julia, not to be outdone, yelled wildly, giving her horse free rein.

How their blood tingled as along the winding road flew the mule closely followed by the horses. Instinctively the animals kept to the bank at the right where glossy bushes of rhododendrons and laurels grew in wild confusion for, at the left, there was a descent leading to a babbling stream which gurgled over the rocks and flowed merrily down into the valley.

"Girls, girls, don't stop!" shouted Harvey, as the road led them down to where they must ford the stream. "For your life, don't stop. I saw the Indians springing down the bank just back of us. It's a chase of life and death now! Come on!"

Into the clear stream he spurred Rueur, and the girls splashed on with him. Julia's horse stumbled on a rock and almost fell. For an instant Harvey pulled in rein.

"Are you all right, Julia?"

"Yes, only some of the water got on me and it's pretty cold; but don't stop for I think I hear the Indians sneaking up in back of us," and undaunted, she flew onward with her companions at a wild speed. They were almost as much excited as if their play were real.

Within a very short time, they had forded the

brook six or seven times, so very winding was the road.

After a while the horses tired of such mad riding for they had been driven up and down hill without any let-up. Their breath shortened; they were soon covered with lather, and the girls felt the sides of the animals heaving beneath them.

"I don't think father would like us to ride so fast," suggested Marian timidly, pulling up slightly.

"Nonsense," cried Harvey, for sturdy Rueur showed no signs of fatigue. "Hurry, they're gaining on us," he added in a sepulchral tone.

"Oh, I'm so frightened," cried Julia hysterically.

"Hush, Julia, or they'll hear you," cautioned Marian giving up her momentary scruples because the others were still so enthused with the play.

"They might track us by the footprints in the road. We ought to do something to mislead them," proposed Julia.

Harvey pondered a moment. Just ahead the stream had to be crossed again which was an inspiration to Harvey, and he said, "Instead of following the road, let's go up-stream so there'll be no tracks. We're sure to come on the road higher up."

Once more Marian was inclined to object to

such daredevil play, but she did not wish always to be the one to cast a damper on the sport, so upstream she went without a word, and at first, splashing through the water proved less risky, and more fun than she had deemed ; but the horses did not enjoy it as much as did their riders. Rueur alone trudged stolidly ahead.

"It's getting sticky," exclaimed Julia who was now in the lead with Harvey.

"That's nothing. All water beds are sticky sometimes, I reckon, and we'll be out of this in a minute," he answered.

Marian did not agree with him, but still offered no objection. She whipped her horse in an effort to keep up with the others, while, at the same time, she became anxious because her horse's feet sank deeper and deeper with every step. Julia's horse, too, dragged its feet out of the mire with difficulty, and it breathed laboriously.

Harvey did not notice how bad the road was because the mule was sturdier than the horses. Then he was still pretending that the Indians were after them and was most intent on escaping the wild men. He was recalled to his senses by Marian crying :

"We must get out of this. I believe it's quicksand."

As she spoke she turned toward shore whipping her horse hard. After a slight struggle the

animal was enabled to draw out its feet so that it soon gained firm footing. Then Marian looked again toward her friends.

Her warning had brought them both to a standstill, and Harvey cried, "She's right. We must get out of this. It may be quicksand," and with the words he applied the spurs which caused Rueur to exert his great strength, so that soon Harvey halted beside Marian on the bank of the stream beyond the quicksand.

Meantime Julia tried to follow, but her tired horse refused to budge and, while it stood still, it was sucked deeper and deeper into the miry surface beneath.

"Hit him as hard as ever you can," yelled Harvey.

Julia struck the quivering horse as bid, and though she whipped hard and long, it either would not or could not make much headway. When Julia saw that her efforts were useless, she let go of the reins and gathered her skirts in her right hand.

"What are you doing?" demanded Harvey.

"I'm going to jump off and wade in." Her foot was already out of the stirrup.

"Stop, Julia. You mustn't. You might be swallowed up in the quicksand. I'll come out and help you." With this, Harvey started Rueur toward the quicksand, but the mule balked within a few feet of the bemired horse. Harvey, how-

ever, now knew the spurs to be a sure cure for stubbornness with Rueur. One dig into the balky mule's side was sufficient to land him beside the panting horse.

"Julia, can you jump over here with me? I think Rueur will take us both to shore."

Almost before he had finished, agile Julia was over on Rueur just behind Harvey.

"Wait," she cried as he was about to turn shoreward. With the word she leaned far over and gave her own horse the hardest cut with a whip it had ever known which so surprised the animal that it succeeded in lifting first one foot and then another.

Rueur needed no encouragement to struggle shoreward. The sturdy little animal, notwithstanding the extra weight, plowed bravely through the quicksand, while the horse with every muscle at great tension, followed.

"I wonder what would have happened if you hadn't come for me," said Julia as Harvey drew rein beside Marian.

"You'd have gotten out all right," he answered partly to make light of his own help and partly because he believed what he said. "You'd have gotten scared and whipped hard like you did at last."

"Suppose Julia's horse will not let us catch it. Do you think it will follow us home?" asked Marian, looking toward the animal which had

paused to graze on the edge of the bank not far from them.

"Not much danger but what we can catch it all right. It's too tired to run from us," said Harvey and so it proved.

Marian looked doubtfully along the edge of the stream as Julia was changing to her own saddle.

"I don't know what we'd better do," she said, when they were once more ready to start. "The bushes hang down so low that we might get in the quicksand again if we try to go back to the road."

"We'll try it through the bushes then," said Harvey, heading Rueur up the bank. The girls willingly followed. Even Julia was somewhat subdued. She would have enjoyed beaten tracks at least for awhile.

"If we go straight ahead we're almost sure to strike the road because it makes so very many turns," continued Harvey.

"I'd hate to go a long way through this tangle."

The undergrowth was so dense that both girls had to draw their skirts close around them, and the horses snorted anew because of the untrodden paths over which they were being taken. Rueur again proved the leader, instinctively picking out the best way. By force of his example, the horses also were encouraged to make slow headway.

"Here's a road," cried Harvey. "It seems to go in the direction of home, so I think we'd better return, as Beth will be getting lonely."

The girls agreed, so they headed in the direction in which they thought Tremont lay.

"Beth will be proud of Rueur when we tell her how well he has behaved. I'd rather own him than either of the horses," said Harvey, patting the mule which looked around in mild surprise.

"He doesn't know what to make of my petting him after the way I dug the spurs into him, but I reckon it didn't hurt much, and it got him out of the quicksand in a hurry."

"Was it real bad quicksand like you hear about, Harve?"

"I reckon it wasn't the worst kind."

"Well it was bad enough anyway." Julia shuddered slightly as she remembered the disagreeable sensation of feeling her horse sink.

"Let's take another run," proposed Harvey when he noticed that Julia's horse had regained breath.

Again along the winding road they cantered, but not at the breakneck speed they had ridden earlier in the day. However, even at a slower gallop, they covered much ground before Marian pulled up her horse suddenly.

"This isn't the road we came."

"The woods look the same," announced Julia,

who had not been noticing her surroundings until her attention was called to them.

"We haven't crossed the brook hardly any."

"I noticed that," admitted Harvey. "But I wouldn't say anything for I reckon all roads lead to Tremont like Roman roads."

"I'm not so sure about that," interrupted Marian doubtfully. "I've found these mountain roads mighty queer. You start off all right seemingly and the first thing you know you're a great distance out of the way."

"Maybe we'd better go back then."

"But we'd not be sure of finding the right road, and, even if we did, it would make us very late getting home. Let's hurry, and maybe we'll come to a mountain hut where some one will tell us how to go."

Once more they urged their steeds to a good pace. All were getting anxious although they did not like to admit that such was the case.

"One couldn't be badly lost hereabouts," declared Harvey to reassure his companions.

"I haven't seen one familiar landmark," said Marian. "It will make us late home so that they may worry. Otherwise I don't mind."

"It's not so very late. It's just cloudy, I believe. If they don't worry, I think it rather fun to be really, truly lost. I never was before," added adventurous Julia.

"I wish these woods didn't close in around us,

for then we could see the mountains which would show if we are still going in the right direction. Let's ride a little faster and maybe we'll come to an open space," said quiet Marian.

For fully a quarter of an hour they rode along without catching a glimpse of the mountains, and without seeing the least sign of human life. Then they came to an opening. But the clouds hung low over the mountains while the sky had grown so dark that they could tell little of their whereabouts. More than ever their hearts sank. They had to acknowledge that they were really lost.

"I never saw the mountains so covered with clouds. An awful storm is coming. What shall we do?" cried Marian glancing apprehensively at the storm signals to the left of her.

"We can only ride on now, I suppose. Luck may be with us."

Darker and darker grew the sky as nearer and nearer came the storm. The children became more dispirited with the lowering of the clouds, and even the animals were growing restive although they were decidedly fagged out.

"It's darker than after sunset. They'll be dreadfully scared," said Marian.

"Here's a road to the right. Suppose we try it," cried Harvey.

All decided that to the right might be Tremont and so turned to the new road. For a few

moments the change made them hopeful, but this feeling lasted a very short while, for, beside the darkness, there were flashes of lightning and angry rumblings, and the road itself grew narrow and rocky. The lightning cast weird shadows across the rutted road.

"We're really lost, and it isn't a bit of fun like I said," thought Julia. In fact for children to be lost in a mountainous country with no human habitation visible proved so terrifying that she felt like giving way to tears, but, being brave-hearted, she suppressed them.

Suddenly, a blinding flash followed by a roar made the horses start and snort. Every nerve of their high strung being was a quiver. Rueur, alone, was unmoved. He picked his way stolidly along the rough trail and his coolness somewhat calmed the horses.

Another flash quickly followed, so vivid that the children took advantage of the light to look around, but what they saw only made them more nervous. The rocks on the hill to the side of them appeared as monstrous giants ready to roll down and crush them to atoms. The ruts in the path seemed even worse than they had thought, but still more discouraging was the discovery that the road narrowed into a trail leading through gloomy pine woods.

"Let's turn back," proposed Marian.

"No. We'd better get under the trees," an-

swered Harvey who was the only one to appreciate the shelter they would afford when the floods descended, as he expected any instant.

"I've heard there is greater danger of being struck by lightning in the woods. And ——"

"Yes, but when the rain comes, your horses would be sure to slip in the clay and dark. Rueur might manage to keep up. How would it do for you girls to wait under a big tree while I ride on ——"

"What, and leave us. Not much. I ——"

Again the sky was illumined.

"I see a house," interrupted Julia joyfully.

Neither of the others had been so quick of vision as she, which made them fear that her imagination was playing her false. However, they rode on waiting breathlessly for another flash to verify her words or else to show them that they must buffet the storm unsheltered except by trees.

"She's right, she's right!" cried Harvey. "There are a number of houses."

The expected flash had revealed to the girls also a little settlement of huts clustered near each other in a cleared space. None were more than a story high and were evidently hastily constructed out of pine logs.

Joyfully they rode toward the first cabin where Harvey jumped to the ground. He handed his reins to Marian that Rueur might not

run away, and walked quickly up to the door and knocked. Receiving no response, he knocked more vigorously, but still no one came. The third time he literally pounded on the door so eager was he.

"They must be over at a neighbor's," called Marian. "I'll lead Rueur to the next house. Some one will surely be home there."

On to the second house they hurried, for the rain was beginning to fall in enormous drops. Again Harvey pounded and pounded, but all his efforts proved useless. Not a soul appeared to be in the cabin. Impatient of the delay he rushed on to a third door, but there met with no better success. After trying three or four more houses, all with like result, they all three were not only puzzled, but were fast being soaked, for the rain was growing worse and worse every instant.

"I'll try one more place, and if no one answers, we'll break in if we can. You girls must get out of the wet. I never knew of anything so very queer," he called as he ran on to another cabin.

"I reckon they're all dead," he muttered as still no one opened for them. Harvey turned to try the window at his right when suddenly he heard a moving within. He waited thinking that at last he had roused the occupants of the place. But when the door did not open, he again struck

it with all his might, assured that he had really heard some one moving.

Once more the same mysterious movement began, but still the door remained unopened. This was too much for Harvey's temper and he was bound to solve the mystery. He made such a racket that Marian cried :

"Why not give up ——"

"Give up," he repeated scornfully. "There's some one in there sure, and I'll just make them come, even if my knuckles are getting sore."

"I'll come and pound too," cried Julia, slipping from her horse. She tied it to a tree and joined Harvey. Marian, likewise, jumped to the ground, and fastened Rueur and her horse to trees.

"Perhaps everybody's dead of some plague. It makes me creepy all over not to have any answer," she said in a half whisper to her companions who were now both pounding as hard as they could.

"There's some one or something still living. Julia and I both heard a sound within. Listen, and you'll hear it too." They ceased rapping.

"You dreamed you heard a noise. There's not a sound," Marian answered skeptically, after holding her ear to the keyhole.

"There's nothing now, but I know I did hear something. Perhaps the person's deaf and don't hear us. That's it, I do believe."

His solution seemed so feasible that they wondered at not thinking of it before. Besides the downpour, it had grown suddenly cold and they stood shivering, trying to fathom how they could attract the attention of an exceedingly deaf person.

"We'll have to break in. We can then yell the situation at the owner," Harvey said, when he could devise no other way. He walked over and tried to pry the window at the right open, but it would not yield. Then he tried the window on the left.

"It's giving way," he cried joyfully. "Come on, girls, I'll help you in."

"I don't need help," and Julia proved her words by clambering through the now open window as nimbly as a squirrel would. She paused just inside.

"There's not a bit of a light in the house," she whispered. "I hear the noise again. Maybe it's a crazy person. I'm scared. They're coming over after me," and out she jumped beside the others.

Even Marian heard the mysterious movement now, and was inclined to believe that the inmate of the dark room might be a crazy person.

"Are you entirely deaf? Speak," demanded Harvey not realizing that their own position might be considered peculiar.

A low sound, so very mysterious that it seemed

like a person or beast in distress, answered him and the three at the window drew back in fright.

"I—I'd rather stay out in the storm," cried Marian.

"Let's go," cried Julia ready to run.

Perhaps Harvey's resolve to enter the mysterious abode would have been shaken had not a flash of lightning revealed a crouching figure in the room very near the window.

"It's—it's a bear," cried Julia her nerves still shaken.

"Nonsense. Come on in," and Harvey was within the room before the girls could grasp him to hold him back.

"Harve, come back," cried Marian.

"Oh, come on in. You're not afraid of a poor, starved dog?" he cried.

"A—a dog?" she repeated hysterically.

The girls would hardly believe that all their fright had been caused by such a poor, innocent being until another flash of light revealed an emaciated dog beside Harvey. Then they scrambled into the room, and began making a great fuss over the starved animal.

"You dear old fellow—to think we were afraid of you," cried Julia.

"Do you reckon he's all alone here?" whispered Marian to Harvey.

Julia, feeling the dog's ribs as she stroked his side, continued, "Why you've been starved. I

wish I had some food for you. I'm hungry my self, but I'd give every bite to you if I had some. It's a shame, a dreadful shame."

He hardly heeded her, but whined pitifully. Then he caught at Marian's skirt and pulled on it.

"He wishes us to go with him," she said. "I've heard of dogs acting like this before. I wonder what he wants to tell us."

The dog whined and started across the room. When they did not follow, he returned and pulled again at Marian's skirt.

"We ought to see what he wants," she whispered, but it was so very dark that she held back to see if her companions would go too.

"I suppose we ought to go," agreed Harvey. Julia, too, thought that they ought to follow the dog. Thus fortified by numbers, they started across the room.

In the darkness of the storm, they could only distinguish imperfectly their surroundings. Harvey's quick eye noted a fireplace. Julia stumbled over something that proved to be a home manufactured stool. Marian bruised her shins on a wooden chair, and then they were at a door which was open.

"Suppose we find some one dead in there," whispered Marian, catching hold of Julia who shuddered and drew back, too. The dog alone did not hesitate. He ran into the room and

whined anew. So pitiful and so persistent was his whining that it seemed to the girls his heart was breaking.

"I—I can't bear to hear him," and Marian placed her fingers in her ears.

"It scares me."

"Is any one in here?" demanded Harvey.

Only the dog's moaning answered him.

"This is an awful place," sobbed Marian.

"It's worse than a haunted house. Let's go."

At this moment a light streamed through a side window making every object in the room stand out in bold prominence. Right beside the door was a box that had served as a washstand, for on it were an old broken pitcher, a tin basin and a small piece of soap. The only other piece of furniture was an old tumble down cot over in the far corner of the room. The dog stood with his front feet on the edge of the bed, and had turned his head to make sure the children had not gone. At sight of them he whined even more pathetically, but they hardly dared look his way for fear some ghastly spectacle might meet their eyes. And yet the mystery of the place drew their eyes to the bed. At first an old sheet and blanket on the cot made it seem as if somebody might be there. While still uncertain what ghastly revelation awaited them, the light gave out. The girls with their hearts thumping wildly, and Harvey hardly less moved,

awaited breathlessly another illumination. In a few seconds their suspense was relieved. Except themselves, no living person was in the room.

"He doesn't know where his master is any more than we do. He's asking us about it," Marian said brokenly.

"It's very strange." Harvey was trying not to appear affected, but a lump would rise in his throat. "There's another room over there, I think. Let's see what we can find in there."

The girls did not care for more adventure, but they would not be left alone, and so they followed Harvey into the back room. The dog ran after them. He was vastly interested in their investigation. Probably he hoped their intelligence might fathom a mystery which had baffled him.

As the children crossed the threshold into the third and last room, they felt an unusually cold blast of air, and a creaking sound so startled the girls that they cried out in fright.

"Who's here?" demanded Harvey in a very brave voice, but his own heart was going like a hammer.

The creaking sound did not stop although he received no reply. Combined with the howling of the wind, it made them all more nervous.

"Let's go. This house is worse than the storm."

"It's strange the dog don't seem to mind," whispered Julia.

Another flash of light made all their spirits rise.

"Why, the door's open. That's what is making the noise," cried Harvey.

In fact the kitchen door was swinging to and fro on half broken hinges, and the wind was beating in the rain in wild torrents.

Harvey tried to close the door fast, but there was no lock or bolt to keep it shut. Finally it came to him that he had seen logs on the hearth in the front room, and he went for one and placed it against the door.

"I do hope nothing more can happen. I'd break down completely, I know. I do wish we were home around the open fire. I'm dreadfully cold," murmured Marian, shivering as she spoke.

"And I'm cold," added Julia, beginning to realize that they were all very wet and miserable.

"You shall have a fire in a few minutes, girls. I've some matches in my pocket and there were other logs on the hearth," answered Harvey.

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CHAPTER VII

Harvey Brings Watch to Beth

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Harvey Brings Watch to Beth

"It isn't half so doleful now," said Marian, sinking down on the hearth after the fire was well started.

For a few moments they enjoyed the heat and light from the fire in silence. The dog alone refused to be comforted. He wandered around disconsolately, but came back every once in a while to attract their attention by whining.

"It's because he's so hungry," declared Julia, judging by his appearance and the state of her own feelings.

"It's very strange about him," said Harvey. "With the door open, why didn't he go and seek food?"

"Perhaps there's less mystery than we're making out." Julia was always quick to recover from any depression. If she had not been so hungry, she would have been actually cheerful now that she had been warmed by the blaze. "Perhaps the people around here are all off at some party or something, and were caught in the rain like us."

"These houses don't look like they belonged to

people who go to afternoon parties," answered Harvey. "And even if they did, I don't believe everybody would go, and why didn't the dog follow when he had the chance? It's very strange." He noted that his words were having a depressing effect, and added, "but we're very comfortable now so what's the use of bothering our heads? The storm will let up presently and away we'll go all right." He wondered, however, how they would be able to find their way home if there was no one to direct them.

The dog was still moaning which made Marian spring to her feet.

"I've got to do something for him. I can't stand his howling so. I'm going to try catching some rain water for him."

"I'd like a drink, too," said Julia, and went with Marian into the middle room for the broken pitcher. They emptied some stale water which they found in the pitcher; then they went into the kitchen and removed the log from the door. The wind slammed the door open and a gush of wind and rain struck the girls squarely in the face.

"The storm's growing worse instead of better," said Marian as she stood in the doorway trying to clean the pitcher before setting it outside.

"I feel sorry for our horses, but the trees will protect them."

In a very short while the pitcher was almost filled. While Marian carried it in, Julia hastily replaced the log.

The three children enjoyed a drink and gave the dog what was left, after which he settled down on the hearth beside them.

Marian looked dreamily at the fire. "It must be supper-time. I wonder if they'll wait for us. Just think how we were feasting last night at this time."

"We'd better not think of it. Water is a pretty poor substitute for food when one's hungry," sighed Julia.

The dog had fallen into a troubled slumber, but he moaned even in his sleep.

"Beth'll ——"

A sudden noise outside brought all three children to their feet instantly. The dog wakened, but only looked expectant.

"They're coming home," whispered Julia.

"Suppose they're robbers," ventured Marian.

"I don't see anything to steal. It sounds to me like horses stamping around.

"Maybe some one's after our horses. What would we do then? I don't believe we ever could find our way home on foot."

Now that they were all listening so intently, they noted anew how the wind shrieked around the cabin and finally drowned the other noise.

"We might be murdered and the folks at

home would never know what had become of us," said fearful Marian.

"Nonsense," but Harvey felt less confident than he pretended. Nevertheless, he walked over to the window and tried to peer out, but it was too dark to distinguish anything. Julia glided to his side.

"Harve, come away. Even if we can't see them, they can see us and might shoot ——"

A sudden crash in the back room made her finish with a scream. She almost felt as if she had been shot.

"They're coming through the kitchen. What shall we do?" Marian rushed over beside them, and the three stood huddled together, trembling greatly, uncertain what new calamity to expect, and too startled to move.

There was no doubt about the kitchen door being open. They knew it by the cold wind that blew in on them. The dog, after a moment or two, settled back on the hearth as if to continue his nap.

"There can't be any one in there or he wouldn't take it so calmly," whispered Marian.

"Let's go and see," proposed Harvey.

The three on tiptoe sneaked to the threshold of the kitchen. The wind shrieked so wildly through the open door that they could not tell if any one had been there.

"What are you doing?" demanded Harvey, assuming very manly tones.

When they received no reply, Julia confessed:

"I may have been careless about the log when we brought the water in, and the wind must have blown it down," and she walked boldly over and slammed the door shut. Harvey, following close beside her, replaced the log against the door.

"We're nervous enough to imagine anything," which was a good deal for him to acknowledge. "I believe the noise outside was only our own animals stamping around, frightened by the storm."

They returned to the front room a somewhat subdued trio. As the fire was getting low, Harvey threw on the last log of wood.

"What shall we do when that burns out?" thought Marian. "It'll be awful in the dark." Aloud she said, "I believe we might better have gone on in the storm. They'll be awfully scared about us."

"We couldn't have done it. It's too bad a storm. Just listen how it's pouring now."

"Maybe this is the clearing rain," suggested Marian.

"Well, just as soon as it lets up in the least bit, we'll try to get home."

Too dispirited to talk about anything but their

adventure, they gazed for a while in silence at the flames, fast dying down. Hunger made them more miserable, and the dog groaning in his sleep did not add any cheer. Julia yawned, and presently the others were doing likewise.

"If I wasn't scared, I'd be sleepy," confessed Julia after another yawn.

"And so would I," agreed Marian.

Harvey slipped off his coat.

"What are you doing that for, Harve?"

"So you girls can have it for a pillow. Honestly, I'll be plenty warm without it."

"I couldn't possibly sleep."

"Nor I."

"Well it will not hurt you to rest. We'll be starting soon now, and you'll need all your strength to reach home. So just try to please me."

"I'll use the dog for a pillow," answered Marian, settling down beside him.

"That's cruelty to animals," declared Harvey. "I really don't want the coat and you must take it."

Thus persuaded the girls accepted his kindly offer, and with their arms twined about each other lay down beside the dog with their heads on the coat.

"This is nice, Harve," murmured Marian sleepily.

"Don't talk," he said, adding, "I'm going to

rest myself." He had no such intention but hoped the girls would sleep if he did not talk.

Although they had not expected to sleep, neither remembered anything more until Harvey awakened them.

"Girls, the storm is over. We had better go," were the welcome words they heard as consciousness returned. For a moment they were somewhat confused as the fire had died out and left them completely in the dark.

"Have we really and truly been asleep?" cried Marian, jumping up. Julia only rubbed her eyes trying to waken fully.

"Well, I should say you had been sleeping—it seemed hours to me."

"And you were awake all the time? That was brave of you, Harve. I wouldn't have watched by myself."

"Has it really cleared?" asked Julia who was now standing and stretching her arms.

"The stars are out. Shall we take the dog with us?"

"Yes, yes," cried the girls together, and Marian added, "Poor fellow, you shan't starve. We'll feed you up well, and then send you back."

She coaxed the dog to the door with her, but he would not follow a step farther, coax as much as they all would.

"How very faithful he is even if his people do

treat him so badly. I fear we'll have to leave him," said Marian regretfully. "Perhaps it would be wrong to coax him away even if we could."

Meantime Harvey had gone over to unhitch their steeds.

"Rueur's gone!" he cried.

The girls did not even stop to bid the dog good-bye. They slammed the door shut and hurried over beside Harvey. No single trace of the mule was discernible, the rain having washed all tracks away. One of the horses whinnied as if he wished to tell something.

"He was stolen when we heard the noise," cried Julia.

"More likely he was frightened by the storm and broke loose. Mules are very strong. I reckon it was he we heard tramping around. I wish I had come out here at the time. I'm ashamed of myself to think I was such a coward."

"We were worse than you. What shall we do?"

"We'll have to ride double. Julia, being lighter, had better go with me on the stronger horse."

"If we only knew the way home, this would be fun," declared Julia a moment later, mounted behind Harvey. They decided to retrace their steps back to the main road as riding through the woods was "spooky," as they expressed it.

A howl from the cabin back of them caused Marian's heart to sink.

"Poor old fellow, he misses us terribly. Why wouldn't he come with us?"

For a short distance riding was easy because of the carpet of pine needles over the path, but, once on the clay road, the horses had to be very careful of their footing as the storm had wrought havoc there. The children chose the turn untraveled by them, hoping to come upon some cabin, and they were not disappointed. After riding about a quarter of a mile suddenly on the left they beheld a hut, but in which gleamed no welcoming light.

"Perhaps it's deserted like the others," said Julia.

"Well if any one's within, I'll soon rouse them," answered Harvey as he hurriedly alighted and walked boldly up to the door.

At first he received no response, but just as he was about to give up, some one within growled:

"What's wanted? Nice time of night to rout a feller out of bed."

Harvey had lost track of time but knew that it could not be very late, and then he remembered that mountaineers kept early hours.

"We're lost. We want to know how to reach Tremont."

The door opened cautiously and a tousled head peeked out at him.

"Lost, be ye?—Why, you uns be nothin' but children. Whar war ye in the storm?"

Harvey answered by a counter question. "Can you tell us what's become of all the people in the little settlement back here in the woods?"

"They're all gone—all gone," repeated the man solemnly.

"Deserted the place?"

"No—dead. Dead of smallpox, an' what was left fled."

"Smallpox?" repeated Harvey, too horrified for more questioning.

"Oh, Julia, smallpox," gasped Marian, who had overheard.

Julia said nothing, but her blood seemed to stop flowing.

"You uns didn't go in any of them air places, did yer?"

Harvey had no time to answer questions.

"I suppose the houses were fumigated," he said.

"Fumigated," repeated the man, "fumigated?" Then to cover his ignorance he began to talk that he might not be questioned. "They came here to hew logs for the railroad, an' they brought their wives an' children an' animals, expectin'——"

"There's a dog in one of the houses now," interrupted Harvey.

"I'd hearn that that thar dawg wuz back. 'Fore the man took down with smallpox, the dawg an' him war everywhar together. The man had no wife nor chick, only the dawg, an' I reckon he sot more by him than by any human bein', for they say as how he wuz a queer chap not like the rest, an' wuz moighty mum 'bout his affairs. An' the dawg sot a power by his master. While the man wuz down with the smallpox, they say as how the dawg never left his side, an' when the man died the dawg jes' grieved an' grieved like a human bein'. Then when what war left started 'way they tried to take ther dawg 'long with um, but he sneaked 'way somehow an' come back huntin' his master I reckon. I've hearn somethin' howlin' when I've been out in the woods, but 'lowed as how hit moight be ghosts."

"Please, please go over and coax him away," called Marian.

"'Deed not," answered the man unhesitatingly. "I ain't no use fer dawgs, an' I won't never go near them places, nohow."

"Did you see anything of a stray mule?" asked Harvey.

"A stray mule is hit?" laughed the man. "An hour or two gone, I looked out jes' 'fore goin' to bed. Hit wuz stormin' powerful hard, an' wuz that dark I couldn't make head or tail of nothin'. Then the sky wuz all lit up fer a

moment, an' I 'lowed I seen a pair of heels streakin' toward Landrums. I rubbed my eyes an' as hit wuz gone, I half reckoned I wuz dreamin', but hit may have been a mule. But yer wanted to know how to reach Tremont. I don't see as how you uns can be lost. Yer've not far to go to get thar now. Jes' keep right on, an' then take the first turn to the right an' that takes yer plum to ther railroad. Thar ride back a ——"

"Ride back?" interrupted Harvey.

"Sartain sure. Tremont is back toward the mountains."

Harvey could not understand how they had circled out of their way so far, but he only said, "Thank you. Good-night."

The man would have liked to question him more, but Harvey was back in front of Julia and away before the man had collected his thoughts.

For a moment or two the children rode on in silence all thinking of what they had just heard.

The trees on either side of the road, water-laden and wind-shaken, shed great drops, wetting the riders considerably, although no rain was falling. Stars were trying to shine through fast scurrying clouds. Although the wind had quieted somewhat, it still moaned as a discontented animal in leash, and every once in a while it whirled madly eastward as if trying to again escape bounds.

"I hate to have papa and mamma know about the smallpox," broke out Marian. Her voice sank to a whisper at the very mention of the dread plague. "They've had so much care lately, and now, just as everything was coming along so splendidly, to have this new worry is a shame."

"Don't let's tell until we're sure we're not going to have it. Were you girls vaccinated? I suppose you were because all the school children had to be."

"Mine didn't take," Marian murmured.

"Mine took a little."

"Mine took all right. I was terribly sick," added Harvey. "Don't worry, girls. I don't believe there's much danger although the man didn't answer about fumigation. The people around a civilized country like this wouldn't leave a house like that open without taking every possible precaution."

"We'll hope not, and I think it a good idea not to speak of smallpox at home." Another matter was troubling tender-hearted Marian. "I can't help worrying about that poor dog. I'll not be able to sleep to-night thinking of him without anything to eat. I do wish that man had promised to go for him. How could he be so hard-hearted?"

"I hear some one coming up the road," whispered Julia. "Maybe it's a robber. Let's hide behind the trees."

Although for a moment a bend in the road screened the approaching rider, some one was unmistakably near.

"Nonsense. There are three of us and so we're safe," answered Harvey.

"It's a man on a mule," said Marian.

At the same moment the rider espied them and cried out :

"Children, are you all safe?"

"Why papa—it's you, and at first we were afraid of you. Yes, we're all safe only Rueur's gone."

"Thank God!" he murmured as he rode up beside them.

"Why Mr. Davenport, you're on Rueur," exclaimed Harvey, suddenly.

"Yes, a little girl brought him to the house and we feared something had happened. I was on my way to Landrums, but we mustn't stop now. They're in dreadful suspense about you at home, and we must ride as fast as the slippery roads will allow."

He turned Rueur in the direction of Tremont, and hunger so beset the sure-footed mule that he easily distanced the horses, and would not be held back, so there was little chance for conversation. The mere presence of Mr. Davenport so eased the children's minds that it seemed a very short time to them before they saw the welcoming gleam of the home lights.

"Chillun, chillun, am dat yo'?" called Maggie from the doorway.

At the sound of their voices, she began shouting, "Missy Beth, dey are safe, dey are come, an' massa am wid dem. Glory halleluia." She rushed into the house still shouting. The children quickly followed.

Mrs. Davenport ran down to greet them. Tears that had been held back while she feared for their safety now forced their way to her sparkling eyes and one or two even rolled down her cheeks. It would have been a relief to shout her joy with Maggie, but instead she hugged all three of them, and even Harvey was glad to feel her arms about him.

"Have they really, really come, mamma?" they heard Beth calling down the stairs. "It's too good to be true. I can't believe they're safe until I see them."

"Hello, Beth," cried Harvey skipping up the stairs two steps at a time. The girls and Mrs. Davenport were not far behind.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come! Why I'm so happy over it, I'd like to dance."

"I'll dance for you, Missy Beth," cried Gustus, taking the centre of the floor and shuffling his feet joyously.

Her eyes rested on him reprovingly. "You said something would happen, Gustus, and now they're here all right, signs or no signs."

For an instant he was nonplused. "Dem signs, Missy Beth—dem shurely meant some-thin'. What 'bout dat mule comin' back widout any one on him—what 'bout dat?"

"He got loose, that's all," answered Marian. "We have just heaps to tell only we're starved."

"Maggie has kept your supper warm, and you'd better go right down to eat it," said Mrs. Davenport.

"You'll all come back the minute you're through and tell me everything that's happened, won't you?" begged Beth.

They promised, and then hurried down to their belated supper.

"You must come down with us, Carol," insisted Mrs. Davenport.

"I hain't one mite hungry," she answered, but later she disproved her words by eating all of Mr. Davenport's bountiful helping.

"It was very brave of you to come through the dark and storm to tell us about Rueur, Carol," said Mrs. Davenport, remembering she had not thanked the girl.

Carol flushed, evidently pleased. "I did hit 'cause of yer gal," she muttered. "She was rale good to me to-day, an' I like her."

Beth's parents exchanged glances, glad that their little daughter won hearts easily.

Carol would have departed when they rose from the table had they not insisted upon her

going with them a while to Beth's room. They knew that her people would not worry as they supposed she was still at Landrums.

Even Gustus and Maggie went up-stairs to hear what had befallen the children. All three took turns in relating their adventure.

"It was risky your breaking in the cabin the way you did," said Mr. Davenport when they came to that part. "It is a hanging offense to break in a house here in North Carolina. They're as strict about it as they are about murder. That's the reason so few homes are burglarized in this state. It's strange that all the cabins were deserted."

The girls exchanged glances then looked to Harvey to say something but he was nonplused for the moment.

"We wondered at it, too, papa," murmured Marian, anxious to keep their secret.

"Possibly the owners came here to do some special work on the railroad and, when it was finished, they just deserted their cabins. You say they were cheap affairs anyway?"

"That was probably it, Mr. Davenport," agreed Harvey quickly.

Marian breathed a sigh of relief.

"Go on about the dog," demanded Beth impatient of interruption. Her eyes grew misty as they told of his pitiful condition.

"And he's starving?" she murmured. "Oh,

the poor, poor fellow. I wish he was here. Can't we send for him?"

"We'll send to-morrow," promised Mr. Davenport.

"But, papa, suppose he died in the night? Let's send some one for him now."

"Suppose we send Gustus," proposed Harvey, his eyes twinkling.

Gustus's eyes began to roll. "No, no, Massa Harve, yo' wouldn't send me in de dark an' ——"

"You're not scared, Gustus?"

"No, no, Massa, Harve," but his teeth chattered. "I—I—it's too far to walk, ain't it, an' I has no way to go."

"You'd lend him Rueur, wouldn't you, Beth?" and Harvey winked at her to see if she was appreciating the fun with him.

But she was in no mood to enjoy the cowardice of Gustus. "I'd be only too glad to have any one take Rueur if they'd only bring that dog here to-night."

"So, Gustus, there's nothing to keep you now," continued Harvey tauntingly.

Gustus scratched his woolly head greatly perplexed. He would not acknowledge that he was afraid to go, and did not know what to answer. His face lightened with an unexpected solution of the problem.

"How yo' done specs me to find dat place all alone when I don't know whar it is?"

"The man was sleeping, and Harve wakened him," continued Marian who had gone on with the recital while Harvey teased Gustus.

Carol rose. "Hit makes me 'low I moight find them all to sleep to hum, so I must be goin'."

"I'll see you home," cried Harvey with alacrity.

"Don't yer mind me," began Carol, but he did not allow her to finish. "Come on," he called hurrying from the room, and she meekly followed.

"He's growing suddenly very gallant," commented Marian as the door closed behind the two. "He's generally bashful with strangers."

"I reckon he feels sorry for Carol. I do," said Beth, but quickly added, "I don't know why I'm sorry though. She says they are to have heaps and heaps of money. I wonder if it's so."

"I've heard about her folks then," said Mr. Davenport.

"Are they to be rich, papa?"

"I can't say. All I know is that lawyers are making her father think he's to have vast wealth. It seems that some branch of the Cornwell family owned property in Alabama ——"

"Carol told me that they used to live there," interrupted Beth and added, "Tell me all you know, papa. I'm very much interested in Carol, and I'm so glad she's——" Beth suddenly

stopped. She was ashamed even to have thought Carol untruthful.

"Well this property was left to another branch of the family, and Carol's grandfather made no objections as the property was considered practically worthless, but very recently rich deposits of iron ore have been discovered on the land which makes it extremely valuable. Then some lawyer found that there was some flaw in the title—some ancestor had failed to sign a deed I believe, or it may not have been properly witnessed. Anyway the lawyer got after old man Cornwell in Alabama and made him believe he could get back his share of the land, and so he carried the matter into court. He died very suddenly and what little he had was left to his son up here along with the lawsuit."

"And they're really to have money?" questioned Beth.

"No one can tell as to that. If they win the case, they'll be very wealthy, but if they lose, they'll be worse off than ever for the lawyers are getting what little money Cornwell had, and the worst of it is that he refuses to work now, and ——" but he too stopped suddenly, deciding that he would not speak of the dark cloud that hung over Carol through her father.

Beth was so busy picturing Carol with wealth that she did not notice any break.

"She'll have the fine things she was telling



BETH



about and take music lessons—I don't believe she can sing, though. I hope she'll come again," she thought, and the romance of the situation caused her to feel an added interest in the mountain girl. In fact Beth was so absorbed in speculation in regard to Carol that she had to tell all she had learned from the mountain girl to see what they would think. Time passed quickly for all present but Gustus. He alone realized the lateness of the hour. He yawned and tried to attract attention to his sleepiness. But failing by quiet means, he arose and stretched his arms gaping noisily.

"Why, Gustus, are you sleepy?" cried Beth, greatly surprised.

"I reckon I ought ter be, Missy Beth. 'Peers like to me it must be powerful late."

"Why it is late," exclaimed Mr. Davenport looking at his watch.

"I wonder why Harvey don't come," said Beth. "He can't be staying all this time down at Carol's."

"Perhaps it's storming again," and Marian walked to one of the French windows at the end of the room. She opened it and looked out.

"No, it has cleared up for good. The moon is shining. Why somebody is riding up our road," she added as she was about to turn away from the window. "Who can it be so late at night?"

Julia and Gustus ran over to look too.

"Whoebber it am, dey're leadin' somethin'," muttered Gustus. "It looks like a bear."

"Hello, girls," called the rider.

"Why it's Harvey, Beth," cried Marian, rushing back into the room. "Where can he have been, and I wonder what he has with him?"

Beth's heart beat convulsively. She wondered if Harvey could have ridden forth to please her, but then concluded that it was too great an undertaking for him. But just as she had come to this conclusion, Harvey walked proudly into the room leading a dog by a rope.

"Oh, Harve, how good of you," Beth gasped.

"Why it's our dog of the cabin," cried Marian. She and Julia rushed to the dog's side. He looked up at them as if pleased to see them again.

"You rode all alone for him? That was very manly of you, Harvey," said Mrs. Davenport.

"It came to me when Beth spoke of being so very sorry about the dog that I just couldn't leave him there until morning, for he might have starved the way she feared," explained Harvey. "She said any one was welcome to take Rueur, and when I offered to go with Carol it was all a bluff. I knew she wouldn't be afraid to go home alone. She said she wasn't, so I just hurried down-stairs, to get some food for the dog. Then I saddled Rueur and rode back to the cabin as

hard as I could go. I heard the poor old fellow howling long before I reached the cabin, and I am mighty glad I didn't wait until morning."

"Was he glad to see you?" asked Marian, her face beaming.

"Glad? Glad is no name for it. He jumped all over me and gobbled up every bit of the food I gave him."

"And weren't you afraid going back there all alone? I wouldn't have gone for the world," said Marian with a shudder.

"Not a bit of it," and Harvey laughed. "I was thinking all the time how surprised you would all be, and how glad Beth would be, and so I was there and back in no time."

"I'm more glad than I can tell. It's about as nice a thing as I ever had done for me." Beth also smiled her approval. "What shall we call the dog? You name him, Harve."

"How would Watch do? You know he was watching for his dead master."

"His dead master?" repeated Mrs. Davenport.

Again Harvey and the girls exchanged glances.

"We thought perhaps his master was dead," muttered Harvey. "What do you think of Watch for a name, Beth?"

"It's a good name. Come here, Watch," agreed Beth.

"Now to bed," said Mrs. Davenport, rising. "Marian, come with me. I wish to speak to you."

Utterly unsuspecting of what was coming, Marian followed her mother as requested.

"You are keeping something from me. What is it?" Mrs. Davenport demanded, facing Marian.

Marian's face crimsoned. "How did you know, mamma?"

"I saw you and Harvey exchange glances, and then I knew by your face."

Marian threw her arms about her mother's neck. "We didn't want to worry you," she murmured, "but it will not be so hard if you know."

As Mrs. Davenport heard how the people in the cabins had died of smallpox, she drew Marian closer. For a moment after Marian had finished, fighting her own fears, the mother said nothing.

"Suppose they had really been exposed, was it not her duty to keep them away from Beth?" This was one of the questions she turned over and over in her mind.

"No," she finally decided, "if there's any danger of contagion, the damage has already been done, and we can but hope for the best."

Aloud she said, "We will not tell the others. There is no use worrying them, and we will not believe there is danger of contagion for any of you. The house must have been fumigated. Do not worry, dear. Good-night and God keep and bless you."

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CHAPTER VIII
The "Wicked Woman"

CHAPTER VIII

The "Wicked Woman"

THE following morning, Beth was again carried down to the south piazza. She was gaining strength rapidly. Her face was joyous as she sat propped up in the hammock, surrounded by all her pets, the squirrel, Dick, the mocking-bird, Duke and the new dog, Watch. The latter appeared to like his new home, but Duke was inclined to be jealous of any attention shown the stranger.

"Duke Davenport, you should just be ashamed of yourself," said Beth, calling him to her and shaking her finger reprovingly. He jumped up placing his two great front paws on the edge of the hammock and from the way his tail wagged, he appeared to think his mistress was praising him. Perhaps it was because her voice was mild even though scolding him.

"It's very, very naughty to be jealous. I used to be, and so I know it's wrong, Dukie. Don't tell, but it's hard not to be sometimes now. Mamma is teaching me not to be and I must teach you. Besides you have no cause to be jealous. I'll always love you the best."

Duke barked as if he understood.

"Go down now and play with Watch," she commanded, pushing him away. He stalked down beside the new dog and began sniffing at him as much as to say :

"My mistress wants me to be friends with you. I'm not sure I can like you, but for her sake I'll try."

Beth pulled the squirrel up to her and unfastening the chain, said :

"You can go again, but you must come back at meal-time like you did yesterday."

Joyously, the squirrel bounded away. At this moment, Dick, hanging in the cage near Beth, broke into song and she looked up at him admiringly.

"You're the finest singer I have ever heard," she thought, and then she began to feel sorry for him because he was a captive.

"Did you ever know what it is to be free, Dickie bird ?" she asked as he paused an instant. "No, or you couldn't sing like that," she answered for him. "I wish I dared let you go free, but you'd never come back, and I'd miss you. We'll try to make you happy. You shall come out here every day with me."

Whereupon Dick broke into a new song, and Carol coming up the hill to visit Beth, paused enraptured.

"Oh, if I could sing like that, I'd be powerful

glad," she murmured, drinking in greedily every sweet note.

Beth did not see her as her attention was taken up by sight of Harvey, Marian and Julia on horse-back.

"You're off, are you?" she called.

"Yes, we had to get an early start as we're to hunt up chickens and eggs this morning," answered Marian. "Don't get lonely while we're gone."

"Don't you get lost to-day," was Beth's parting shot.

Watch started to follow the riders, and Beth began calling him, but, as he was unaccustomed to his new name, he did not heed her.

Carol came to her rescue by chasing the dog and bringing him back to Beth.

"Thank you, Carol. I was afraid he'd get lost. I'm glad to see you," said Beth as Carol stood panting before her, holding Watch by the collar that Beth had placed on him before letting him loose.

"Whar did yer get him? He looks like a purp of Brune's that a man who came to work on the railroad got from we uns."

Beth explained how Watch had been brought by Harvey the night before.

"He's Brune's purp sartain sure." She patted his head as she spoke and then called, "Brune, Brune, come an' see yer son!"

Brune, always within hailing distance of her voice, bounded into sight, and Watch broke free from Carol's hold to run down beside Brune, greeting him as if he knew the relationship between them.

"Look, he knows Brune an' Brune knows him!" cried Carol delightedly. "He'll be a good dawg if he's anythin' like his pap. Here's a present fer yer," she added drawing a soiled red ribbon from her pocket. "A lady gave hit to me onct, an' I sot a power by hit, but I wants yer to have hit."

Beth drew back. "Oh, Carol, I'd rather have you keep it."

Carol looked disappointed. "Perhaps yer don't think hit nice."

"It's not that." Beth hated to hurt her feelings and added, "I always like red."

"Yer must take hit then," and the ribbon was thrust down beside Beth who began turning over in her mind what she should give Carol in return.

The two girls were so intent on their own affairs that they had not noticed the approach of a lady on horseback, but the three dogs leaped out into the path before the rider and barked.

"Oh, Mrs. Morton, I'm so glad to see you," cried Beth, delightedly.

Carol arose, intending to sneak away.

"Why, that dog looks like one my husband

lost up in these mountains a few years ago!" exclaimed Mrs. Morton pointing to Carol's dog. "His name was Brune."

For a moment Carol stood like one paralyzed. Her face grew so very white that she seemed to have no vitality left; then this inaction gave place to a frenzy of passion. She flew down the steps like one possessed while her eyes blazed.

"Yer shan't take my dawg," she cried, clinching her hands. "Brune's mine, he's my dawg. Come away, Brune. We'll hide from that wicked woman," and down the hill she started with Brune close after her.

At first Beth was too surprised to speak.

"Call her back," commanded Mrs. Morton.

"Carol, don't run away. Please come back," pleaded Beth.

Unshaken in her resolve to keep Brune at any cost, Carol ran desperately fast until she no longer heard Beth calling except in imagination.

Gasping, she drew Brune close to her, and sinking down on the ground beside him, threw her arms about him, weeping as if fearful he would be torn from her any instant.

"She shan't take yer from me. We'll run far 'way where that wicked, wicked woman kin never find us." She arose and started toward the mountains as if to carry her threat into immediate effect. With every step, it seemed as if she heard Beth calling, calling. Again she threw

herself down by Brune, sobbing even more convulsively. As if sharing her fear, he whined.

"She'll never like me no more," Carol thought with Beth's call tugging at her heart. "But I can't go back, an' give my dawg up. I can't do hit."

Once more she trudged on a little way, but all the while her love for Beth was urging her to return.

"Maybe the wicked woman wouldn't take Brune from me if she knew as how I loved him." Again she turned to the dog. "I'd go to jail 'fore I'd let any one take yer from me," she murmured. "Brune, I don't want yer to follow me. Yer must lie here till I cum fer yer, an' then if we can't stay rightly together, we'll run far 'way. That's right, lie still."

Several times on the way back she would have rejoined Brune if love for Beth had not strengthened her toward right doing.

The sight of Mrs. Morton, or the "wicked woman" as she still termed her, talking earnestly to Beth, enraged Carol anew so that she would have again fled if Beth had not caught sight of her dress among the trees.

"Carol, I'm so glad you've come back."

As Carol sidled toward the porch, sobs choked her; her eyes were so blurred that she could see hardly a step ahead. So frightened was she that

her knees gave way, causing her to fall limply down at the foot of the steps.

"Don't take my dawg, don't take Brune," she sobbed. "He's 'bout all I have to love in all the world. I love him, I do."

Until this moment, Mrs. Morton had fully intended to claim the dog, principally because of Carol's defiant attitude, and even Beth thought Carol in the wrong, but her evident grief melted both their hearts.

"Haven't you parents?" questioned Mrs. Morton.

"Yes, but—but paw, he—he"—Carol meant to tell how he ill-treated them all, hoping to gain sympathy so that she could keep Brune, but pride held the confession back. "Only let me keep Brune, an' I'll work fer yer," she pleaded. When Mrs. Morton did not answer immediately, Carol added defiantly, "Yer kin send me to jail, only I must keep him." Suddenly a new inspiration came to her. "Don't take Brune, an' I'll give yer all my money when hit comes. We're to have heaps, 'though we hain't much now. Please, please let me keep him."

"Brune is yours. I give him to you," answered Mrs. Morton.

The reaction made Carol hysterically happy; her face was transfigured.

"Oh, oh, oh," she sobbed and laughed. "I—

I can't help hit 'cause now no one never kin take Brune from me!" She sprang up the steps beside Mrs. Morton and seizing her hand kissed it over and over.

"Forgive me," she sobbed. "I called yer a wicked woman an' I'm the wicked one. I wish I could make yer as happy as yer have made me. Ye're the nicest woman in the world, only yer look powerful sad. Is thar anythin' I kin do fer yer?"

Mrs. Morton's face twitched convulsively. "No one can help me," she murmured. To hide the tears that welled over as she spoke, she turned hastily toward the house.

"I am going in to see your mother a moment, Beth."

"Did I say somethin' as I hadn't ort to?" questioned Carol.

"She has just lost her little baby girl—her only child."

Carol was distressed. "I'm rale sorry; rale, rale sorry. Isn't thar somethin' I kin do fer her fer givin' me back Brune? I love her 'cause she did that."

"If there's ever anything she wants done, I'll let you know, Carol."

"An' I'd do hit no matter how hard hit'd be."

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CHAPTER IX

Don

CHAPTER IX

Don

MORNING after morning, Carol came to keep Beth company, but she always waited until the riders had departed, and then bobbed up in the most unexpected manner. She seldom came empty-handed. Sometimes, she only had a flower, picked on the way; other times, it was some knickknack that she treasured, articles utterly useless in themselves, but very precious in the eyes of Carol. Beth rebelled over accepting such gifts, still her protests proved of little avail.

"Rich folks always give presents," she answered when Beth objected. "'Sides I love yer an' love to give yer things."

Not only did she bring her offerings to Beth, but she brought others to send Mrs. Morton.

"She's rich like you, an' don't have no use for the presents I send, but it 'peers like to me that the love thoughts I send 'long with the things may help her," confided Carol to Beth, and when Beth repeated this to Mrs. Morton, the lonely woman was so pleased that she resolved to help the little waif of the mountains if she could.

On these morning visits of Carol's, the two girls were always surrounded by their pets. The squirrel alone ran away from them, but invariably, exactly at meal time, it reappeared.

"How do you suppose it knows when to come back? It has no time like us to go by," said Beth to Carol.

"Hit's like me, I reckon. I hain't never had no time to go by, but my stomach tells me when hit's time to eat. Animals don't need to larn sech things. Look at Dickie thar. He never had no lessons, but he's as good as any singer that's had lessons an' lessons. He jes' keeps his ears open an' then lets forth. That's the way to larn."

In truth, Dickie was proving not only a wonderful vocalist, but a great mimic. Both Beth and Carol were intensely interested in watching the progress he made.

His first achievement was to mimic the roosters and hens. The girls could hardly believe the sounds did not come from the hen-house when he startled them with a crow and then a cackle.

"I 'most 'spected to see him flap his wings," announced Carol the second time he crowed.

The pussy that Gustus had was very playful, but it mewed a great deal as it was always hungry and that was the only way it had of calling attention to its wants. Beth always knew when it was around by its cry.

"Meow, meow," heard Beth and Carol as they were deeply absorbed in playing with Beth's dolls.

"Here kitty, kitty, kitty," called Beth, but no kitty jumped up as usual on the hammock with her.

"Meow, meow."

"Where is kitty? I can't see her any place," said Beth.

"Hit hain't kitty. Hit's Dickie."

Another morning, before Carol had appeared, the children rode around as usual to bid Beth good-bye. As the horses neared the piazza, one of them whinnied. Dick cocked his wise little head to listen. The horse whinnied the second time, and Dick heeded even more intently.

"Oh, Beth!" exclaimed Marian, "we've something perfectly lovely to tell you. Mamma thinks all danger of our having the smallpox is past."

"Smallpox," repeated Beth blankly.

Marian laughed gayly. "Oh, I forgot you didn't know," and then she explained how they had been exposed the night they were lost.

After they had ridden away, Beth lay in the hammock with deep gratitude in her heart that nothing worse than a scare had followed that awful night.

Suddenly she was startled by a whinny. She looked to see if they were returning, but there was no sign of horse, mule or human being. She

thought she must have imagined the sound, but again she heard a whinny just like the one the horse had made a few minutes before. But still no horse was in sight, and so she decided that it must have come from a distance, and sounded so near because of the wonderful mountain air.

Just as she accepted this solution, for the third time she heard the whinny and it was unmistakably near-by.

"Hit's Dickie! Hit's Dickie!" cried Carol, emerging from behind a tree where she had been watching. "I know hit's him," she continued as she rushed up on the piazza. "I saw him with my own eyes."

That it was Dick seemed incredible to Beth, until being so pleased over his new accomplishment, he whinnied once more.

"It is Dick," cried Beth so delighted that she clapped her hands as if she expected an encore. "Isn't he wonderful? Next to Duke, I love him the best of any of my pets."

"I've another pet for yer. I'll be back in no time."

Beth tried to detain her, but she would not heed. Dick broke forth into a joyous flood of song, and Beth so sympathized with his mood that she sang also. Besides her joy in the mocking-bird, she had great cause for rejoicing. She was just beginning to walk around a little by herself and there was never a happier or prouder

girl than she to think that soon she would need no more waiting on, but could do things for herself and go around like other girls.

"I wonder what I can get for Carol?" thought Beth as she saw her coming back up the hill carrying something in her hand that was covered with a cloth and which on nearer view proved to be a cage.

"What are you doing with that, Carol?" questioned Beth not dreaming it could be the present for her.

"Hit's my robin." Carol looked very important. "I've had hit most a year, an' hit am a powerful nice singer, but not rale peart like Dickie thar, but I 'low as how Don'll larn some from Dickie, an' I'll think on that if I ever miss him."

"She wants to give me even her beloved robin. What shall I do?" thought Beth. Carol had told her how greatly she prized the bird, and Beth felt that she could not accept such a gift.

"It was nice of you to bring it over to visit Dickie and me," she said aloud.

Carol looked distressed. "I reckoned as how yer'd keep Don."

"Let me see Don." Beth purposely evaded the question of accepting the gift. Past tilts with Carol in which she had been routed made her dread defeat.

As Carol drew off the cloth, there was a gleam in her blue eyes that caused Beth's heart to

sink. Carol, did not intend to be kept from her purpose.

"Hit am pretty to look on, hain't hit?" asked Carol, placing the uncovered cage on a table beside Beth. "An' if hit don't sing as nice as Dickie, hit'll surely larn by bein' here with him."

Beth started to reply, but a warning finger was held up for, as the sunlight flooded Don's cage, he cocked his head on one side.

"Hush, he's goin' to sing," whispered Carol, triumphantly.

At that instant, Dickie, with an eye on the new-comer, broke into song, so joyous, so beautiful, that even Beth, accustomed to wonderful trills and runs from the fine little singer, was astonished; while as for Don, he looked up in evident wonderment and envy. He had never even dreamed of such music before. The song in his own throat was hushed to listen and marvel.

"Dickie's pleased to see Don," whispered Beth fearing that it might not be real polite of her bird to interrupt the visitor, and that Carol might feel hurt.

Carol did not seem to mind. She smiled happily. "Don's listenin' to larn. Dickie'll give him lessons all the time. I'm so glad ye're to have Don. I ——"

Beth faced her with determination not to yield this time.

"But Carol, I can't keep your ——"

"Oh, yes, yer kin." Carol looked at her so pleadingly that she had to reassure herself that she was in the right not to relent a little.

"My maw won't be bothered with Don; she says I've got to get rid of him, an' hit'll be a rale kindness if yer'll keep him for me. I'd hate to let him fly away."

"I might sell him for you."

"Sell him?" tears rose to her eyes, and affected also her voice. "I love him too much fer that. If yer won't take him fer me, I'll have to let him go. Please, please take him, I'd miss him so if I had to let him go."

"But you'd miss him if I took him."

"Then I'd see him every day, an' hit'll be a comfort to think of him with some one I love. Yer won't make me cry by not keepin' him? Please, please let Don stay fer hit'll make me an' him rale happy."

What could Beth do in the face of such insistent pleading? However, she did not accept outright.

"I'll keep him for you until your money comes," she said for she had grown to think that Carol was to have the money she so confidently expected. "Your mother cannot object to your having him then." Then she added, "haven't you a doll, Carol? I've never seen you with one of your own."

"Me have a doll?" repeated Carol. "I never

had none, but I'll have all I want when I'm rich. I'll have one with dark curlin' hair like yourn, an' brown eyes, an' I'll dress hit like a lady."

Beth immediately decided to send to Spartanburg for such a doll, but she said nothing of her intention as she wished it for a surprise.

The following morning, Carol was over earlier than usual to see how her pet was behaving.

"I believe Don's homesick," announced Beth in greeting. "He hasn't sung a mite, but Dickie's very happy over having him here. He sings almost every minute of the time. Just hear him now, and see how Don watches him."

"Don's takin' lessons," insisted Carol. "Jes' as I'm goin' to do when we get our money."

Day by day, Don continued his unwonted silence, and Dickie sang most of the time. The coming of Don taught Dickie a word. Beth felt sorry for the robin, and talked to him quite a little calling him often by name. She did not realize that Dickie was listening, but all at once he commenced calling, "Don, Don."

Sometimes Beth closed the windows of the library, and allowed the birds a taste of liberty. They enjoyed flying around the room immensely, but when tired they willingly reentered their cages.

One morning just as Beth had freed the birds, Carol appeared at the front window. Not observing what Beth was doing, she tried the

window and, finding it unlocked, swung it open quietly, and was inside the room before Beth noted her.

"Oh, Carol, close it, close it!" cried Beth.

Carol sprang back to do as she was bid, but the warning came too late. Out through the open window flew Dickie. Don was intent on following, but Carol slammed the window shut just in time to save him.

Beth sank down on the floor in a heap, and broke into a storm of sobs. "Oh, my Dickie bird. I'll never see him again. Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

Carol looked completely crushed. Never had she been more scared.

"Yer'll never like me no more," she moaned, "no more at all."

Beth did not even heed, being too grieved to think of anything but her own loss.

A flood of melody, very faint because of the closed windows, attracted Carol's attention. Without a word, she managed to drive Don into his cage, then went toward the window.

"What are you going to do?" questioned Beth through her sobs.

"I'm goin' after yer bird."

"It's no use. You can't catch him. I'll never see him again."

Nevertheless, Carol rushed from the room. Beth arose and walked listlessly out on the piazza.

High up in one of the pines was Dickie singing, oh, so joyously. Carol intended to climb up after the bird, but he caught a glimpse of his pursuer and flew on to the next tree. Carol chased after. Dickie swooped down on a rhododendron bush, and looked back as much as to say :

"Come on, little girl. It's fun to have you chase me."

Breathlessly, she accepted the challenge, and Dickie allowed her to come within reaching distance. Her heart was in tumult at thought of capturing the bird, and cautiously she stretched out her hand. In fact it just grazed the outstretched wings, and then with a chirrup Dickie was off again. On and on he led her, often allowing her to come so near that escape seemed improbable, but ever the bird just eluded her outstretched fingers.

Meanwhile, Beth brought Don out and hung his cage in Dickie's place.

"If one had to go, why couldn't it have been the silent one," she wondered, and tears still trembled on her lashes.

The robin looked around as if seeking the mocking-bird, but the rival songster was far away by this time, and no warbling greeted Don as usual. Suddenly he drew his little body to full size and his throat swelled. Low and sweet he broke forth into song. At first his notes trembled on the air as if he feared to be

silenced, but when he found that no master's song was to drown his effort, he gained courage. His notes deepened and flowed forth with as much sweetness, with almost as great certainty, with almost as much triumph as had Dickie's own. Many of his runs and trills were copied from his rival.

Beth almost felt as if her mocking-bird had returned. She stood breathless for fear the robin would become silent again.

"Oh, if Carol could only hear," she thought. "It's as she said. Don was afraid to sing until now, but he has been taking lessons from my bird. I do wish she would come back. She'll never be able to catch Dickie. She thinks I blame her, but she didn't mean to let him go."

All morning she watched for Carol. Nevertheless, her hitherto unfailing visitor did not return. In the afternoon, too, she waited on the porch, only to be disappointed when nightfall drove her into the house, and she had seen nothing of the mountain girl.

Before the curtains were drawn, Beth stood by her window a moment and looked longingly down toward the hollow.

If her eyes could have pierced the twilight, she would have seen a dejected little figure dragging her weary feet homeward. All day Carol had kept up the pursuit, and only at dusk did she acknowledge herself defeated. Near her

cabin home, she sank down on a stone, with faithful Brune still beside her.

"Brune," she murmured brokenly, "ye're the only one who loves me."

He licked her hand to comfort her if he could. Carol was too tired and too dejected to feel intensely. Her eyes burned, but the tears in them were dried up.

"Hit's no use, Brune," she continued. "I love her, an' would do anythin' fer her, an' I've hurt her dreadful. The only thing fer us to do is to keep 'way." She rose as if there was no more that could be said on the subject. Then her eyes were attracted by the lamps that were being lighted in the house on the hill. Even through the trees, she caught a glimpse of Beth at the window, and the numb feeling that checked her tears gave way.

"Oh, Brune thar she air," she sobbed, "an' she'll never like me no more nohow. Even when our money comes, I cain't be like her no ways. Hit hain't in me er I wouldn't hurt her dreadful when I loves her so. She never hurts me, an' she don't love me like I love her. She loved Dickie more 'n she ever did me. We must keep 'way, Brune."

Watching until Beth pulled down the shade, Carol threw herself face downward on the ground feeling as if she was being barred from Paradise, and there she lay crying hopelessly.

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CHAPTER X

An Angel of Mercy

CHAPTER X

An Angel of Mercy

"LET'S make candy," suggested Marian one afternoon when she and Julia were sitting on the porch.

"All right," answered Julia enthusiastically. Thereupon both girls proceeded to the kitchen where they spent a busy but happy hour in the mysteries of candy-making. Bob, a friend of Gustus had just arrived in search of Gustus and while the girls were letting the candy harden on the floor of the kitchen shed, Gustus burst in.

"Miss Marian, Missy Beth wants yo' up in her room. A package done come from Spartan-burg," announced Gustus from the kitchen door.

Marian and Julia both sprang up.

"It's the doll," they cried, forgetting the candy and rushing away up-stairs.

Gustus and Bob both eyed the candy greedily. The girls had cut it in squares, but had not taken any out.

"Yo' don't specs any, do yo', yo' sassy nigger yo'?" demanded Gustus fiercely of Bob. "I'll

jes' take it up-stairs, an' mebbe dey'll thinks yo' guv me some."

Up from the floor he grabbed the two platters carrying them up to Beth's room.

She had just taken a beautiful doll from an express box.

"Do you think Carol will care for it?" she asked, wistfully, holding out the doll for inspection.

"Like it?" repeated Marian. "Why, she'll be too overcome for anything. It's the prettiest doll I ever saw."

While pleased, Beth was still heavy-hearted.

"She hasn't been here since Dickie flew away, and no one knows how much I miss her," she thought.

Aloud she said: "I'd like to dress the doll for her."

"I'll help," promised Marian, impulsively.

"So will I," added Julia.

"You're awfully good, both of you, and I'd like help cutting the things out, but I'd rather make them all by myself."

Gustus considered it high time that they were noticing him.

"If it hadn't been fur me, de dogs could have eaten all dis candy."

"I'd forgotten all about it," cried Marian, and observing his hungry look added, "You shall have some candy, Gustus."



"LET'S MAKE CANDY"

Materials for the doll's garments were hunted up, and soon were cut out. As Mrs. Davenport would not allow Beth to work too steadily, the doll was not ready for a week.

"How am I to get it to her?" asked Beth.

"Send Gustus down."

Beth's face fell. "I want to give it to her myself."

So they decided to have Gustus ask Carol to come up.

"Gustus," Beth said when he was ready to start on the errand, "don't say a word about the present."

"No 'deed, Missy Beth. Yo' ought to keep dat fine lady doll yo' own self." He was somewhat inclined to be jealous of Carol.

"And Gustus, tell her that I don't mind much about Dickie now. I know he's enjoying his freedom. Every once in a while I hear him singing in the woods."

Gustus nodded his head. "Dat's so, Missy Beth. I hears him too. Shall I tell her 'bout Don?"

"Yes. Tell her he sings almost as well as Dickie did. That will bring her sure. Hurry back, Gustus."

While he was gone she thought of Carol, and it came to her that perhaps it was more than the loss of the bird that was keeping her friend away.

"Maybe their money has come, and she's waiting to surprise me," she thought. "She told me that some day she'd come up here dressed so fine I wouldn't know her. If she has all the money she says, she may get proud, but I don't believe it of Carol, and she'll like the doll even if she has money."

Her heart sank when she noted Gustus returning alone.

"Where's Carol?" she demanded eagerly when he was in hailing distance.

"Dunno," he answered stupidly. "She didn't say much. De doctor was thar."

Beth looked startled. "She's not sick?"

"Not as I knowed on, 'though she looked peaked like, an' acted powerful queer. Wouldn't tell me nothin' nohow."

"Wouldn't she come even when you told her I wanted her?" repeated Beth more grieved than she would show.

"Said she moight hav' to come some day. Dem war her own words."

Pride kept Beth from sending again. Nevertheless, when two more days passed without any sign of Carol, Beth was not only mystified but resolved to go down herself as soon as her mother would permit.

"I'll ask if I can't go to-day," she thought on the third morning as the riders departed.

At the same moment Carol sneaked up on the

steps, and dropped down on the topmost one against the post. She would not face Beth, but in a fleeting glimpse that Beth caught, Carol looked older and seemed unhappy.

"Hit's come," she announced.

Beth noted that she wore the same old clothes, and that she did not appear triumphant. In fact her whole attitude expressed dejection as well as her voice, notwithstanding which her words conveyed only one possible meaning to Beth.

"What's come? Your money?" she demanded eagerly.

Carol shook her head sadly, without a word.

Beth could not imagine why Carol acted the way she did unless she was still brooding over Dickie.

"Anyway, she's sad over something, but the doll will make her glad," she thought and so she brought it out.

"Isn't this a pretty doll, Carol?" she asked.

"I dressed her all myself."

Still Carol appeared no less listless. She only gave a fleeting glance at the doll nodding her head.

"Do you like it?" demanded Beth eagerly, thinking that she was overcome with the grandeur of the fine lady.

"Hit am rale peart-like," but she said it with so little enthusiasm that Beth grew impatient.

"I think you might say something nice about

it after I've had so much trouble dressing it. Wouldn't you like to own this doll for your very own?"

Much to Beth's surprise and disgust, Carol shook her head.

"You wouldn't like to own it? Why not?"

"Hit's only for fine ladies like yer," she muttered.

At first Beth was inclined to be angry, but Carol's manner was so puzzling that she resolved to fathom the mystery.

"You've always told me that you are to be a fine lady."

All at once Carol's stolidity gave way, and she broke into a passion of sobs. Beth hurried to her side.

"Why, Carol, what's happened?"

But feeling so overmastered Carol that she could not answer. Her breath came in gasps, while tears splashed down her face so fast that she could not keep them wiped away though she tried.

"Hush, hush, dear. If you tell me, it may help you," continued Beth, trying to comfort her the way her own mother comforted.

"I hain't never to be no lady," Carol finally blurted out. "We uns hain't to have no money, an' we hain't none at all. Paw hain't been home fer a week. When he hearn the news hit done druv him to drink worsen than ever, an' maw's sick,

awful sick, an' we've got a three days old little babby gal at our place. We hain't no food, an' no one'll trust us now that we're not to have money. I cum to see if yer maw'll let me do washin' for you alls."

Such a flood of misfortune overcame Beth. For a moment she could think of no comfort to offer. She simply stared helplessly at Carol while her heart sank more and more. The idea of such a young girl doing washing was both ridiculous and pathetic.

As Beth looked from the poorly clad girl to the finely dressed doll that she still held, she repented having spent her money on a useless gift. Never before had she realized that Carol could ever be in actual want for the bare necessities of life. Her silence made Carol more miserable.

"I wouldn't have cum to yer, if they all hadn't been so hungry to hum. Do yer reckon yer maw'll let me do yer washin'?" she repeated.

"You never could do it. You're too little," Beth murmured.

An utterly hopeless look settled on Carol's face. She did not shed more tears as Beth fully expected, but only brushed away the undried ones on her woe-begone face, and arose to go.

"Wall, I must be goin'."

Beth pushed her down again almost roughly. "Don't you dare go, Carol. Wait here, and I'll be back in no time."

If the house had been on fire, she could have flown no faster for aid. She dropped the doll on a chair and rushed on toward the kitchen. Her mother was not home, so she sought her faithful mammy.

"Maggie! Maggie!" she called.

"What yo' want, honey?" demanded Maggie from the kitchen.

"Come here, Maggie—in the library! I want you immediately!" and when her mammy responded to the imperative call, Beth added breathlessly, "You know where my bank is and I want it right away."

"But honey ——"

Beth's eyes snapped. She was in such a hurry that she had little patience. "Don't stop to question me, Maggie. The money's my very own, and I shall do just what I like with it, so get it for me, there's a dear, good Maggie."

Greatly wondering, Maggie hunted up the bank as commanded.

"There's a dollar and a half in it," said Beth seizing the bank. "I had papa count it the other night after I paid for the doll. I want to get every cent out," and she struggled to open it. "I wish papa were here. He's always opened it, and I don't know how it's worked. What shall I do, Maggie?"

"Wait 'til yo' paw comes back."

Beth stamped her foot. "I can't wait. I

must have some money this very minute. Can you lend me some, Maggie? I'll pay you the minute papa comes."

"I'se mighty sorry, precious lamb, but I done giv' my last cent to yo' paw to put in de bank for me. I 'lowed as I had no use to spend it up disaways."

Beth struggled a moment more over the bank and then gave up in despair. She felt ready to cry. "I must do something. She said they were hungry. What shall I do?" she thought.

All at once, she swooped down on Maggie and held her as if fearing she might vanish.

"We have things charged at the store, don't we, Maggie?"

"Shure, honey."

Beth's eyes sparkled more than ever. "I want Gustus to go over to the store for me. Do hunt him up for me; there's a dear, dear mammy." When Beth used such a tone, Maggie had never been known to resist her.

"Hump, she's up to somethin' mighty queer," muttered Maggie as she went in search of Gustus. "Don't reckon I should be a—a partciple to her spendin' her money, but ——" she finished her soliloquy by shaking her head. She was thinking that Beth was not easily stopped when in her present mood.

Hardly was the door closed behind Maggie before Beth went over to the desk, and, taking up

a pencil and paper, sat down to figure out just what to send for.

In her excitement she began gnawing the pencil. "Let me see, they always like hominy—they call it grits," and she wrote on her paper:

Grits, - - - - .25

Again the pencil was raised to her mouth, and her forehead was puckered in thought. Never had she solved a more difficult problem. After a moment or two of thought, she dashed off the following list:

Cornmeal,	-	-	-	-	.25
Tea,	-	-	-	-	.25
Sugar,	-	-	-	-	.15
Bacon,	-	-	-	-	.25
Butter,	-	-	-	-	.20
Bread,	-	-	-	-	.10
Coffee,	-	-	-	-	.20
Potatoes,	-	-	-	-	.20

Then she drew a line underneath and figured up, but, to her dismay she had overspent her amount. The poor pencil again was an outlet for her overwrought feelings.

"I only have a dollar and a half, I know," she thought, biting viciously on the pencil, "and it comes to a dollar eighty five. Oh, why did I buy that doll? I might spend more than I have though, for I could make it up to papa some time. I'm sure to be given more money, and he wouldn't mind. He'd give me the money himself."

"Gustus, Gustus, do hurry," she called, hearing him with Maggie.

"I'm comin', Missy Beth."

She hesitatingly held out the list to Gustus as he entered, but then drew it back, shaking her head solemnly.

"I can't do it much as I want them to have the things," she declared to herself. "It wouldn't be honorable. I'm not sure of prices anyway, but Maggie can help me out."

Before consulting Maggie, however, she walked to the door to make sure that Carol was waiting. She saw her still sitting dejectedly by the post.

"Carol, I'll be out in a moment. Wait for me," she called.

"Brune an' me'll wait," answered Carol still dispirited.

Beth turned back to Maggie who had returned even more slowly than Gustus.

"Maggie, listen to what I'm going to buy and tell me what I can leave out so it will only come to a dollar and a half," and before Maggie had chance to utter a word, Beth ran over her list. "You see it comes to a dollar eighty five, and I only have a dollar and a half," she wound up breathlessly.

Maggie was completely mystified. "Law honey, we hav' all dem 'gredients in de house ——"

"Didn't I tell you? They're for Carol's folks. Her mother has a little baby, and they haven't a thing to eat in the house."

"Hump," muttered Maggie who, notwithstanding her kindly heart, had little patience with "pooh white trash." "Don't yo' let 'em fool yo', missy dear. Dey's nothin' but ——"

"Hush, hush," cautioned Beth. "Carol's out there, and she'll hear, and she's proud."

Her words inflamed Maggie more and more. "Proud nothin'. What she come heyre for den an' beg all my tender-hearted gal's money ——"

"She didn't beg. She wanted to do our washin', but she's too small. You think she's too small, don't you, Maggie?"

"Dat chile do our washin'?" gasped Maggie after an instant of silence. "She's workin' on yo' feelin's, dat's all. She nebbeh 'lowed to do it. Do washin' 'deed. I'm jes' goin' out to tell her what I think of sech goings on."

Beth made a dive at her to hold her back. "You mustn't, Maggie. I wouldn't have you hurt her feelings for the world. If you knew all about it the way I do, your heart would ache for her too. We must help her. Why, just think, she didn't even want the doll."

"Not want dat beau'ful doll," repeated Maggie, incredulously.

"No, she said it was too fine for her."

Such action upset Maggie's preconceived idea

of Carol's duplicity. Half mollified, she patted Beth on the shoulder.

"Well, well, dat's monstrous queeh. Well I nebbeh—but yo' jes' wait den, till Miss Mary comes back. She ——"

"I can't wait, Maggie. You must tell me what to leave out. Listen very carefully while I read the list over."

Maggie, who was not yet entirely won over, kept muttering while Beth read, "Well I 'clah to goodness, dat chile do beat all. I always knowed she was soft-hearted, but I didn't know she could think out a thin' like that all by hehself."

Nevertheless she paid good heed to Beth's list and at the end, she said :

"I done know one thin' to leave out. If dese pooh whites hav' grits, dey don't care for potatoes."

Beth scratched out that item. After a moment's figuring, she said :

"I've fifteen cents too much yet. Please help me, Maggie."

"Hump," ejaculated Maggie again, but added, "Well, well, read dem thin's over, honey."

"Wait," she interrupted when Beth came to the sugar. "I done tole yo' what we'll do. Scratch dat out, an' I'll giv' yo' some sugar."

Beth was pleased but doubtful. "Mamma would give it to me if she were here, but I don't know as we should take it with her away."

"I'll 'sume all 'sponsibility," declared Maggie with dignity.

Whereupon Beth handed to Gustus the list with the sugar scratched out. "Have them fill it out at the store and charge it. I'm going to give papa my money. You bring the things down to Carol's yourself, and hurry just as fast as you can. I'll be waiting there for you."

Maggie, who had started to go for the sugar, paused on the threshold and turned a still troubled countenance Beth's way.

"'Deed, honey, an' yo' ain't exspeculatin' to go down thar yo'self? I jes' shouldn't count'nance sech proceedin's. It ain't fittin', an' what's moah it am a long ways for yo' to go. Yo' ain't walked much an' I done feared yo'——"

Beth had skipped back beside Maggie and now patted her lovingly.

"Maggie, I must go and it will not hurt me in the least, so please don't say another word; there's my own dear, good, kind Maggie."

"Hump, I ain't no dear, good, kind nuthin'," she muttered in return, but Beth had gained her own way, for Maggie flounced out of the room without farther protest. Beth hastened out on the piazza.

"Come on, Carol, I'm going down to see the baby."

Carol made no move to rise. She did not even look up at Beth and tears were trickling down

her cheeks. She tried to brush them away without Beth's noticing them but was not successful.

"We must hurry," declared Beth, impatient of more delay.

"Don't yer come," cried Carol after a moment's hesitation. "Yer'd never hav' nothin' to do with me agin. Hit's no place for the likes of you uns," and her tears fell faster.

"I'm your friend, Carol, and I want to go down with you," whispered Beth, consolingly.

Still Carol did not rise, but, hiding her face in her hands, sobbed, "I'm 'shamed of the dirt. The others are too young to work, an' hit takes all my time to care fer the baby an' maw. Hit's powerful dirty. I didn't think much 'bout hit 'til I met you uns. You mustn't go thar."

"I am going down, so that's all there is about it."

Such persistence conquered Carol who, without a word, arose. Maggie now returned with the sugar whereupon the two girls started down the hill, Brune leading the way. So absorbed was the mountain girl in her own troubles that she forgot that Beth might still be weak from her sickness, and so she walked at such a rapid pace that Beth lost breath trying to keep up with her.

"Carol, I can't go so fast," she panted finally.

All contrition, Carol stopped still. "I never onct thought as how yer hadn't walked much. Sit down and rest."

Beth shook her head. "I'll be all right if we walk slower, but now I'm wobbly all over."

"Yer jes' lean on me. Yes, yer must."

Her aid proved very acceptable for Beth was weaker than she thought. At the spring her strength gave out completely so that she sank down on a rock to rest. Carol was greatly concerned. She gathered some of the clear, running, ice cold water in her rough hands and bathed Beth's forehead.

"That is very nice," murmured Beth. "I'd like a drink of it."

"Thar's nothin' but a gourd to drink from."

Assured that Beth liked a gourd, Carol leaned over the spring to get her a drink. Beth watched with much interest. Her breath had returned and with it her strength.

"Why didn't you tell me how beautiful it is down here, Carol?"

Still kneeling, Carol turned a surprised face her way. "I never knowed hit war beautiful. Thar's jes' these wild things growin' all 'round like they do everywhar, an' the water jes' flows out through the rock onto some more rock. I always liked hit an' hit makes me feel like singin' lots of times 'cause hit's so happy—the stream thar I mean, but I never 'lowed as how other people like you uns would care for it," she added as she brought the water for Beth to drink.

Greatly refreshed, Beth arose ready to go for-

ward. She knew that her strength would last out now, as Carol had said they were most there.

Through the trees she saw a cleared space, but the only sign of a habitation was a tumble-down log hut. At first Beth thought it too wretched a hovel to be the dwelling-place of any human being, and then she noted a number of children near the open doorway.

"Are they neighbors of yours?" she asked politely.

Carol hung her head. "That's whar we uns live," she muttered.

"You live there?" repeated Beth. She was so shocked that even with all her desire not to hurt Carol, she could not help showing somewhat how she felt.

"I tole yer not to come," said Carol, half sobbing.

"Don't cry, Carol. I'm glad I came. Let's hurry," she added in hopes of diverting Carol, which she succeeded in doing, for Carol sprang forward to assist Beth and the two made their way to the cabin.

The children stared open-mouthed at the stranger with their sister. The youngest child, still holding a lump of something that she had taken from her mouth, sidled up to Beth and lisped, "I'se so hungry."

Beth could not take her eyes from the lump in the child's hand.

"Carol, what's she been eating?" she asked.

"Clay," answered Carol laconically.

"Clay?" gasped Beth. She had heard of clay eaters in the mountains, but had never believed that people really ate clay until she saw with her own eyes the child eating it. "Oh, Carol, it's dreadful."

"I reckon hit am," she agreed. "I never ate hit. Hit makes people all dried up. They jes' hain't any blood at all. She never eat hit nother 'til now, but I can't stop her. The others are takin' to hit, too. They hain't quite so hungry when they eat hit."

Tears came into Beth's eyes. "I wish Gustus would come," she thought. Then she kneeled down beside the little toddler. "Give it to me," she demanded, holding out her hand to take the clay, "and you shall have something to eat in a moment or two—something nice." She turned to the others who were still staring at her. "Never eat any more clay, and I'll see that you have plenty to eat all the time," she promised recklessly.

They were all so overawed by her appearance and words that they only continued to stare. The little toddler, however, understood her meaning sufficiently to relinquish the clay.

"Me have somethin' nice to eat. Pretty girl say so," she murmured.

"Hit hain't become a habit with um yet like with some," explained Carol. "I reckon they won't eat no more if they have food."

Beth felt sick all over. She dreaded to go inside the cabin, but would not turn back.

"Had I better see the baby now?"

"Maw, here's the young lady from up on the hill to see yer," called Carol.

"Come right in," answered a feeble voice from within.

"Yer all wait here," said Carol to the children, and then she led Beth within.

Apparently there was but one room to the shanty. As Beth glanced around the disordered place, she vaguely wondered where all those children outside slept. Plenty of dirt was in evidence as Carol had predicted, but Beth hardly noted it. Her eyes were immediately attracted to a dilapidated bed in the corner on which lay a woman old with care more than with years. In her weary thin arms was a puny baby which whimpered fretfully. The woman's eyes were unnaturally large but sunken. A new light leaped into them as their gaze fastened in wistful earnestness on Beth's face.

"Did Carol tell yer all 'bout us?" she cried eagerly raising herself on her elbow. The baby's whimper changed to a cry, and the light faded from the mother's eyes.

"Hit's awful hungry," she explained, "but I can't give hit anythin' myself and we hain't any milk in the house."

Beth's heart sank because she had ordered no milk.

"Carol," she whispered after a moment's hesitation, "go up to the house and get a pitcher of milk. Tell Maggie I sent for it."

Her least wish was a command to Carol who hastened to fulfill her order.

With Carol gone, Beth felt more uncomfortable than ever. She sat down on a rickety chair not knowing what to say or do. The mother would have talked to her had not her babe claimed her entire attention. It quieted from a cry to a moan, but this proved so pitiful that Beth finally could stand it no longer.

"Shall I walk up and down with it?" she asked timidly, rising and going over to the bed.

"That would be powerful kind," answered Mrs. Cornwell completely worn out herself.

Nice, clean babies were the only kind Beth had ever known and she thought she loved all babies. But this one was not clean; in fact it was repellently dirty. As the mother held it out toward her, she shrank back slightly, almost ready to withdraw her offer, but she was entirely too kind-hearted to intentionally hurt any one, so, overcoming her momentary weakness, she took the poor, little moaning waif to her heart. Back

and forth, back and forth, she walked, humming a lullaby. She was not much of a singer, but her charge soon quieted under such soothing care.

"I think she's asleep," she whispered, stopping by the bed for her arms ached and she was faint.

"I'll take her," but when Beth started to place the baby beside its mother, it began to whimper again.

"Perhaps I'd better keep her. I'll bring a chair over beside you, and perhaps I can keep her quiet sitting down."

The plan worked well for Beth patted the baby as it lay on her lap and soon it quieted again.

"We've brought a sight of trouble on ourselves," said the sick woman speaking to Beth as she might have to a grown person, and then explained, "I had a better eddication than I've been able to give any of my young uns, an' when we 'lowed as how we were to have money, their paw an' I reckoned as how hit would make ladies an' gentlemen of 'em. We didn't 'low 'em to 'sociate with any one here'bouts, an' now we're bein' paid back for bein' so proud-like. None of 'em cum to help now that we need help," and she sighed pitifully.

No word of comfort suggested itself to Beth. She felt very helpless, but had she only known how soothed the poor, burdened woman was just

to speak of her trouble, Beth would have been relieved, too.

"God alone knows what's to become of we uns," continued Mrs. Cornwell fretfully. "I'm 'bout tuckered out, an' Carol"—her voice broke, "I hates to think on her. Onct she an' I 'lowed as how she wuz to be a singer. I usen to sing at meetin' myself when I wuz a gal in Al'bama, an' Carol has my voice only sweeter an' stronger like."

"Perhaps Carol can sing then," thought Beth, but the baby began to cry again so that poor worried Beth had to walk the floor once more. With all her heart she wished that Gustus and Carol would come. The waiting seemed an eternity to her.

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CHAPTER XI
Beth's Plan

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Beth's Plan

"WHAR's my Missy Beth?" were the words that finally brought comfort to the self-constituted little nurse who placed the now sleeping child beside its mother.

"Come right in, Gustus," she called. "Put the things over there," she added as he came in, pointing to a table in the corner of the room near the fireplace.

"Whew," ejaculated Gustus as he deposited his load. "I done reckon dey put in stones wid dese things. My arms shurely ache."

Beth looked around the place for a cook-stove but failed to discover one.

"Where do you do your cooking?" she asked of Mrs. Cornwell.

"On the open fire thar. Yer kin have the boy call to one of the young uns to bring in some logs an' start a fire, an' by the time Carol's back hit'll be goin'." She accepted the present of food as a matter of course, but Beth did not mind, she was so pleased in the doing.

Soon the fire was blazing on the hearth, and then Carol came and Beth was overjoyed to behold Maggie come panting in behind her.

"Oh, Maggie, how good of you!" she cried and there was a catch in her voice from very joy.

Maggie's face beamed too. "I jes' 'lowed as how yo' might need me, honey. I done come jes' on yo' 'count." She sniffed contemptuously. She did not wish Beth to think she would bemean herself by running after "pooh white trash." "'Sides de milk, here am some eggs an' soup broth dat'll be good for de sick woman."

Beth would have given the milk to the baby cold, but Maggie knew better and warmed it.

One by one the children sneaked into the room, the smell of food attracting them. Poor, starving things, they could not keep away although Carol ordered them out several times. "Wait 'til ye're called," she said. Beth who could not stand the sight of their greedy eyes spread a number of slices of bread with sugar sprinkled over, and gave each child a piece, even to Carol who was as famished as any of them.

"More, more," lisped the little toddler who had thrown away the clay. She had devoured the last crumb and was still starved.

Beth stooped over and kissed her unmindful of dirt.

"You must wait, dearie. Maggie is cooking something nice for you all."

"Girl hungry?" questioned the little one feeling a tear on her face that Beth had shed.

Meantime Maggie had heated the broth for the sick woman, and had taken it to her.

"Hit'll give me strength so's I kin work fer my young uns," she murmured gratefully to Maggie. "An' the milk has chirked her up already. The baby'd have died if you alls hadn't come."

Maggie felt a tear in her own eye. Her prejudices vanished as she worked for them, but she bustled back to the fireplace to hide her emotion, and stirred the kettle of grits that was now steaming. When it was about ready she began frying the bacon and its savory odor filled the place, and the children clustered nearer and nearer around the hearth.

Beth would have set the table but there was no cloth to spread, and no dishes except a few cracked ones, and then there were not nearly enough chairs to go round, so all the children sat on the floor each with a spoon, but eating out of the one dish.

As Beth, with shining eyes, eyed the little crowd, she marveled how they could eat so much. They scraped the dish clean and not a piece of the bacon did they leave, except for Carol who saved a share of her helping for Brune. Beth immediately resolved to send some dog meat to the faithful fellow.

"Maggie," whispered Beth when the rest of the provisions had been placed away for future

use, "couldn't we wash the baby? She needs a bath dreadfully."

By this time, Maggie was warmed up to any undertaking. She placed water in the kettle to heat and then turned to Carol.

"Has yo' a tub? Missy Beth 'sires to wash de baby an' she mus' be washed."

Carol was doubtful of such an undertaking, but if Beth wished it, she thought it must be all right, so she hunted up an old tub.

The children watched rounder eyed than ever while the bath was being prepared as if they thought the ceremony about to be performed some heathen rite.

"Yer don't s'pose hit'll make her take cold?" questioned Mrs. Cornwell, anxiously, as Beth herself undressed the baby.

"Cold nothin'," sniffed Maggie, running her arm into the tub to make sure the temperature of the water was just right. "When she's clean, she'll be a dif'runt chile shure. Hand her to me now," she added to Beth.

Beth would have liked to help with the bath, but Maggie, who felt herself the high priestess of the occasion, would have no aid.

"Go 'long, honey, yo' ain't strong 'nough fer sech work," she declared, and all Beth could do was to stand by and watch. However, she managed to save the little toddler from a wetting for it was so curious, it would have fallen into

the tub with the baby if Beth had not grabbed it.

When the baby was finally raised from the tub, it seemed a different child as Maggie had predicted. It was so nice and clean that Beth only regretted not having some new clothes for it.

"Dis room ought to be cleaned foh we go," declared Maggie when once more the baby was placed beside her mother. "Yo' wait outside while Carol an' me brushes up a bit," she said to Beth.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," answered Beth firmly. "I'm going to help," and though Maggie objected, it was of no use.

"I ain't no words to thank yer," said Mrs. Cornwell when Beth and Maggie were ready to depart. "But I've a favor to ask."

"What is it?" asked Beth, fearing she could not grant it now that all her money was gone, but she decided to ask her father for help.

"I thought some of callin' the little gal here, Elvira 'cause hit's sech a romantic name, but now I'd like to name her after yer, if yer don't mind. What is yer name in full?"

"Elizabeth Davenport."

"If yer don't mind, then, I'd call her 'Liz'beth Davenport Cornwell."

The idea of such a namesake completely overwhelmed Beth who felt a new responsibility about the child.

"Do you really wish to name her after me?" she asked.

"I do, an' yer'll surely come agin to-morrow as yer promised to see 'Liz'beth an' me?"

Outside Carol had something to say on the subject. "At first I didn't want the baby," she confessed. "I didn't see how we uns could care fer hit when thar war so many of we uns already, but then hit war so helpless, an' hit clung to me so that I couldn't help takin' to hit some. An' now that hit's to be called 'Liz'beth after yer, I'll jes' dote on hit."

Beth was very weary. Even listening to Carol tired her more. She clung to Maggie's hand and looked up at the long hill that still had to be climbed. Now that excitement no longer lent her strength, the return trip home seemed a terrible undertaking.

"Good-bye Carol, I'll be down to-morrow," she promised listlessly.

"Look thar," exclaimed Carol. "Thar comes the young gentleman."

Beth looking in the direction in which she pointed saw Harvey on Rueur coming leisurely toward them.

"Hello," he called. "I heard you were down here, and thought I'd find out what you were up to."

"I know what I'd like to be up to," thought Beth, eyeing Rueur wistfully.

"Why, Beth, you look completely worn out," remarked Harvey as he sprang down beside them. "You must ride up the hill."

Her tired face flushed in sudden pleasure. "Oh, how nice that will be. My very first ride on my mule, too. But how can I ever get up on his back?"

"Shure, honey, dat's easy. I'll lift yo'. Yo' weight'd be no more dan feathers to me," and Maggie picked her up and placed her on Rueur.

"Good-bye, Carol," said Beth the second time, but with enthusiasm now. She even waved her disengaged hand as the mule started up the hill with her. Harvey, Maggie and Gustus walked beside her.

"What have you been doing?" questioned Harvey. Beth placed a finger on her lips, but Maggie would not heed the warning.

"She's done been a little angel ob mercy, dat's what she's been for shure."

"Oh, pshaw," murmured Beth. "Don't you listen to her, Harve. I'll tell you all about it up at the house. I only did what anybody would have done."

"Anybody done," muttered Maggie. "Law, honey, dar's lots ob common trash in dis world."

"You're not of that kind, Maggie. I don't know what I'd have done without you to-day." Her eyes were slightly dim.

Maggie's face beamed, but she too muttered,

"Oh, pshaw, honey. Don't yo' listen to her, Massa Harve."

The rest of the way up the hill Beth was planning for the family in the hollow.

"I might give Carol a hen and a rooster and some eggs for the hen to set on to raise chickens. It'll look nice to see chickens about the place, and we can send down and buy chickens and eggs from them. In time they can make lots of money that way."

At the house she called a council of war when she found that all the family had returned. After telling her afternoon's experience, she said:

"We've got to do something for them 'specially after the baby's named for me. I thought of something we might do and I want to know what you think of my plan. How would it do to get up a benefit for the family, and give them the proceeds? I know the people up at the hotels would come when they heard what the entertainment was for. Then there'd be all the town people besides."

"Let's have a circus," proposed Harvey.

A circus appealed to adventurous Beth. "We'll teach the dogs to perform, and we can ride Rueur and the horses."

"I'll not have any of you risking your necks riding. You can teach the dogs tricks if you wish," answered Mrs. Davenport.

Great were the schemes as to what should be



"IT'LL LOOK NICE TO SEE CHICKENS ABOUT THE PLACE"

done. The most improbable things were suggested, but out from the mass of ideas set forth, the determination grew to give the entertainment. Even Mr. and Mrs. Davenport approved the plan.

"I wish we could have Carol take part," said Beth. "It would seem then as if she were helping herself. I think she's proud, and the idea of charity hurts her."

"A good idea, Beth," answered Mr. Davenport. "I always believe in helping people to help themselves."

"But what under the sun can Carol do?" questioned Marian.

"I'll think up something for her," announced Beth.

The entertainment was uppermost in all their thoughts for days thereafter. They planned to have something that would be more unique than the ordinary church affairs that were sometimes given in the town. At first it was deemed impossible to carry out Harvey's suggestion of having the entertainment outdoors.

"Why any one could come, and needn't pay if they were dishonorable," declared Marian.

"Let's put them on their honor," cried Beth who was always for trusting people. "I know just the place where we could have it. There's an open space all around Carol's cabin. Why not have it down there right in sight of the people

we're going to benefit? Let's go down and have a look at it. I've got to go down and see them anyway." It was her habit now to make daily visits, and many a basket of necessities had found their way to the cabin through her, and she had already started Carol in the chicken raising business.

Down into the hollow the four hastened. The place impressed them all as a fitting spot for their show. The pines had been hewn down leaving a clearing larger than they would need.

"The dogs can perform here all right," said Harvey who had taken their training upon himself.

"It's a shame that mamma will not let us ride. It would be grand to perform bareback the way they do in the circus," and Beth sighed regretfully because her mother had remained firm in barring riding from their plans. Mrs. Davenport knew too well the adventurous spirit of the children to allow anything so risky.

"What would we do for seats?" asked Julia.

"They have benches in the church on the hill back of us. Maybe we could borrow them," suggested Marian.

"I'll ask for them," answered Beth, and that very day she went to interview the minister on the subject.

"You can take them if you have any way of getting them there and back," he promised

after hearing the object for which they were to be used. Whereupon Beth secured her father's consent that on the morning of the eventful day, Rueur be hitched to a wagon and that he would have one of the men working for him haul the seats.

"What will you do if it rains?" questioned her father.

Beth had not even taken into consideration such a catastrophe.

"That would spoil everything, but we'll not think for a moment that we could have such awful luck," she added with her usual optimism.

The next question that came up was whether they should have any outside help to amuse their audience.

Mrs. Davenport settled the matter for them. "If you are sufficiently smart to think up amusement without grown-up people taking part, it will prove more interesting," she said, "and you'll make more money too, I believe."

"How much shall we ask?" demanded Beth.

"Do not have any set price," she suggested. "Let people give what they wish." This advice was also accepted.

Harvey had the three dogs, Duke, Watch, who had greatly improved with the kindness that was showered upon him at the Davenports, and Brune in training even before the children

decided what parts they, themselves, would attempt. Every morning he went down into the hollow with them, and his most interested spectator was Beth, who never failed to be with him to note how well they were doing.

"I had no idea they could be taught so much. I don't believe I'd ever have had the patience to teach them. It takes heaps of patience," said Beth one morning.

"Well I should just say it does," agreed Harvey, looking up from where he held the dogs in leash awaiting their turn to jump from the plank he had built for the purpose. The dogs were so anxious to take the long distance leaps that they barked and pulled on their chains, in real enjoyment of their training.

"It's just wonderful the way they've improved the short time you've had them in hand," continued Beth admiringly. "Watch is the best jumper," she added, as the dog in question flew up the plank and outdistanced Duke's last effort. Beth was somewhat jealous for her pet. She had gladly adopted Watch, but he could never win the place in her affection that Duke held. In fact Watch appreciated this and so he lavished the most of his affection on Harvey.

"Watch is my star pupil," agreed Harvey.

Marian and Julia now joined them.

"It's worrying me what under the sun we, ourselves, are to do," said Marian.

"If I show off the dogs that's enough for me," broke in Harvey.

"No it's not," answered the three girls at once.

"It's easy enough to tell what you're to do," said Beth. "We need music, so you'll have to send for your violin and play."

"I can play with him or alone on my guitar," proposed Marian. "That will be an easy way out for me."

"And I could dance if we only had a platform. You know, Beth, I took fancy dancing lessons last winter," announced Julia in her turn.

"I wish now I'd taken lessons," Beth murmured.

"I told you you'd be sorry," retorted Julia. "Can't we have a platform?"

"We've got to manage one some way," answered Harvey.

Beth looked disconsolate. "Carol and I are the only uncertain ones. I suppose I can learn some pieces to recite, and I might teach her something. I'll try anyway. I'll learn funny pieces—people like to laugh. But what can Carol learn?"

Gustus, who was with the children whenever he had the time, overheard what they were planning. His eyes began to roll as they always did when he was excited, and he hopped around first on one foot and then on the other to attract attention, but no one noticed his antics.

"I kin dance, too," he blurted out finally.

Beth was the first to catch his meaning. "You'd like to take part, would you, Gustus? And so you shall," she added in response to his vigorous nod. "The Northerners, especially, will like your dancing."

He was so delighted that he began showing off his various steps to let his little mistress see that she could rely on his proficiency.

Upon their return to the house, Beth hunted up some recitation books and with her mother's aid, selected several comic pieces hoping that among them, she could choose something not only for herself, but one for Carol also. Then she hastened again to the hollow to impart her design to Carol.

"Me recite?" repeated Carol. "I can't."

Beth's enthusiasm was not to be so easily quenched. "You must. I'll teach you. Sit down here by me." And when Carol was on the log beside her, she opened one of the books to "The Elf Child."

"Now say after me, 'Little orphant Annie's come to our house to stay.'"

"Has she? Who's she?"

"Why I'm reading it from the book. Don't you see the words written here?"

Carol hung her head. "I hain't been to school much."

"Can't you read?"

Carol had never felt her lack of knowledge as she did at this moment. She twisted her dress nervously, keeping her eyes lowered that Beth might not see the tears that almost blinded her.

"Not a powerful sight like that thar," she murmured. "I only tended school one term fer we didn't have no school up in the mountains, an' when we uns came down to Tremont, I got 'shamed 'cause I was put in with the little children, but I'd have kept on only maw needed me to hum."

"Carol, after the show, I'll have to teach you some," promised Beth impulsively. "It's a shame for you not to know more."

She paused a moment gaining courage to speak of a matter about which she had been thinking for some time.

"Carol, would you like me to correct you in your talk, when you say things wrong?"

Beth was surprised to see tears rise to her friend's eyes.

"Why Carol, I just wished to help you. I wouldn't hurt you for anything."

Carol tried to smile through the tears. "Hit's not that. Hit's 'cause I'm so pleased like."

"And you really want me to help you?"

"'Deed I do if yer'll only do hit."

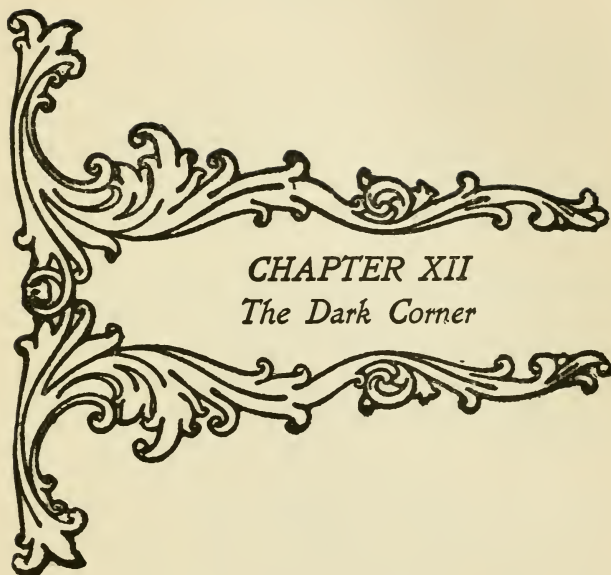
"Then you mustn't say 'hit.' Say it."

"It, it, it," murmured Carol. "I didn't know 'fore that I said hit—it dif'runt." Then she

added, "I'd try most anythin' to please yer, but—don't ask me to larn that thar piece to say at the show. I hain't a bit of callin' that away. Please, please don't do hit—it."

Beth could not resist such pleading. Then, too, she realized that Carol had no "calling" for reciting.

"I'll try to think of something else for you to do," she promised.



CHAPTER XII
The Dark Corner

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The Dark Corner

THE very name "Dark Corner" appealed to Harvey. It bespoke mystery and adventure, and, ever since he had first heard of it, he resolved to ride over that way, all alone.

So early one afternoon he asked Beth if he might take Rueur to which she readily consented.

"Beth, you're the only one I've told where I'm going," he said at parting. "It's better not to let the girls know. They'd want to go too, and it's not the place for girls," he added, feeling the importance of his sex. Had he but known the truth, the other sex was better tolerated in the "Dark Corner" than his own.

Away he started riding toward the spot where he had been told the "Dark Corner" lay over under the shadow of Hogback. His pulses thrilled. Actually he hoped to chance upon some of the illegal distills about which he had heard much.

At the end of two miles or so he was surprised to come upon a gate right across the middle of the road. He hardly knew what to do, but resolved to open the gate half expecting if

he rode onward to come upon some house where he intended to ask if he was intruding.

To open the gate without dismounting proved a difficult matter. Every time that he reached down to the latch, at that very instant Rueur would grow restless and jerk away. Then the same performance was repeated over and over again until, at last, his efforts were rewarded.

Closing the gate after him, he galloped along noticing that the land around him was uncultivated and that there was not the least sign of a habitation. Still he was dissatisfied, longing to travel some mountain trail that bespoke even less civilization. Onward he rode without seeing the least sign of human life, and still desirous of some unusual experience.

Uphill and downhill Rueur carried him while the woods around were so wild that Harvey finally had a sense of being entirely alone almost in a primeval world. For a moment a feeling of fear weighed upon his mind.

"Perhaps it would be better to go over some way I know," he thought, but immediately the love of adventure conquered fear.

As if to tempt him, to the right he beheld an evidently disused road, deeply rutted; unmistakably washed by many a rain. Weeds, too, had sprung into luxuriant growth almost hiding where the road had been.

Without an instant's hesitation, Harvey headed

Rueur to the right. Within a few moments he came to a stream which he forded. Once across, there was no more evidence of a road.

While Harvey waited, pondering what to do, Rueur took the reins into his own keeping, and turned to the left to nibble at the bushes. His so doing decided Harvey's course of action. Right beyond the bushes he beheld a trail, the finding of which made his heart thump. Again he indulged in no hesitation, but dug the spurs into Rueur to follow the trail which proved sufficiently wild to suit even Harvey. The branches of the trees grew so low that he had to stoop not to be swept from the saddle, while the bushes on either side reached right across the path as if warning him not to proceed. Still Harvey would not turn back.

"I want something to tell Beth, and this certainly looks mysterious enough," he mused.

Suddenly he came to a hillside where the trail, too, ceased.

"We'll go up the hill anyway," Harvey said aloud to the mule, once more using the spurs.

With a plunge Rueur started upward, and it was well that he got such a good start for the earth was soft and stony while the climb proved extremely steep.

Wilder and wilder grew the scenery. The stillness was oppressive. The sun, too, was beclouded momentarily, which made the woods around and

above dark and awe inspiring. Immense boulders often blocked the way, so that Rueur had to choose his footing most carefully.

Harvey leaned far forward in the saddle as if to assist the mule upward. Now he had no thought of turning backward as long as the mule could possibly proceed. Harvey, some way, was assured that an unusual experience awaited him if he only persevered.

Nevertheless, he was startled when suddenly he heard a murmur of voices ahead.

Stealthily to the ground he slipped. Fastening Rueur, he stole through the bushes intent on seeing what was before him without being seen himself, but the undergrowth was so luxuriant that, without warning, he almost fell down an embankment, as he had not been looking for any such precipitate descent.

Caution overcome now by fear of a fall, he reached out wildly to save himself. With ease he caught hold of a tree, but in so doing some dry twigs beneath his feet crackled.

At the same instant, almost directly below, a sight confronted him that might well make his heart beat.

Beside a stone still were two masked and armed men, and one of them aimed directly at poor, trembling Harvey.

"Don't shoot! I—I'll never tell!" yelled Harvey.

The men looked up surprised. They had not even heard the crackling, and had no thought of an intruder when aiming their pistols.

"What yer doin' thar, kid?" called one of them not threateningly, Harvey thought.

"I—I was just taking a ride. My mule is back there." Whereupon Harvey made a move to go.

"Have him come down," called a voice from the underbrush to the side of the men. The speaker was so well screened by the green that Harvey could not even get a glimpse of him, but he was evidently no mountaineer as Harvey knew by his speech. This fact made Harvey a little less fearful.

"Cum on down," called the men.

If they had not been armed, Harvey would have risked running.

"I—I don't know how to get down."

"I'll show yer," and the nearest man ran nimbly around the still to a path at the right.

"This way," he called cheerfully.

Harvey did not feel at all cheerful. The men being armed and masked as they were had a serious look to him, and even if the third man was better educated, he might still be a cutthroat.

"I'd better put a brave face on anyway," he resolved as he started toward the path.

The men below were talking in low tones.

"Deciding what they'll do with me," Harvey

thought, trying his utmost to overhear what they said, but without success.

Half-way down the path he beheld at the spot where the third voice sounded something projecting through the bushes, and was vastly surprised to discover that the object was a camera.

The situation was growing more and more puzzling every moment, but the discovery of the camera lightened Harvey's fear so that he hurried downward more willingly.

A gentlemanly appearing man came out from the bushes and smilingly said:

"Well, my boy, I think I've just gotten a very unusual picture, and that it will be good unless the shade is too dense."

"Picture?" repeated Harvey, hardly yet taking in the situation.

"Yes. Did you really think we were making mountain dew?"

"I—I was too scared to think much," stammered Harvey, too relieved to be sure that he was not being deceived.

"I knew of this deserted still and had these men dress up for my benefit," explained the photographer. "If the picture turns out well, I'll send you one. You deserve some reward for the scare I've given you."

Harvey felt like himself once more. "It will be fine to have the picture. My, but things did look black for me for awhile."

He walked over to examine the still. The photographer accompanied him and explained how it was worked.

"That man knows this business thoroughly," said the photographer, presently glancing over his shoulder toward the spring where the two men were getting water. He indicated the one farthest from him. "I imagine that he may have made whisky himself once."

The men had by this time taken off their masks and Harvey thought he must have seen the man some place before, or else he reminded him of some one. Harvey could not decide which.

"What does he do now?" he asked.

"Nothing but drink, I reckon."

The men now joined them, and the photographer took some money from his pocket.

"Here's the amount I promised you, Cornwell."

Harvey knew that he had heard that name before, but could not place it.

The photographer was ready to depart, so after Harvey had given him his address, he, too, decided to go.

Just as he was leaving, he heard one of the men say :

"Cornwell, I'll be thar at the house at the foot of the track at eight to-night."

"I'll be waitin' yer," answered Cornwell.

At the time the words made small impression on

Harvey's mind, having no idea that they would concern him in any way, so light-heartedly he ascended the path, thankful that his adventure had proved uneventful.

He had ridden farther than he thought, and by the time he reached home it was almost dark.

Supper was awaiting him, and once at table he immediately related his adventure.

"My, but I was scared when I saw Cornwell aiming at me as I thought. How should I know that he was posing for a picture?" said Harvey in finish.

"Cornwell?" repeated Beth. "Why that's Carol's name. Can it be her father?"

"I knew I'd heard the name before," said Harvey.

"Speaking of illegal distilling reminds me of my own vexation on that very subject," said Mr. Davenport. "I have a suspicion that whisky is being sold in one of my own houses."

"Why don't you stop it then?" demanded Marian, who was very strict on the temperance question.

"Because I cannot prove anything. It's this way. About a month ago I rented a house below here at the foot of the railroad track."

Even at these words Harvey did not remember what had passed between Cornwell and his companion about a place at the foot of some track.

"No one moved in," continued Mr. Davenport,

"but I've been told that men and boys go there for whisky, that money and jugs are passed through an opening, and I mean to solve the mystery."

"Miss Mary, dey's to have a cake-walk obber at de hotel to-night, an' dey done 'low dat you all should come," announced Gustus.

Mrs. Davenport looked at Beth. "You should not go, dear, and so we had better stay home."

Marian and Julia were disappointed. Still on account of Beth they would not ask to go.

"You must go without me." Beth's lips quivered slightly but she tried very hard to be brave. "It's just the chance to talk about our show to the guests there."

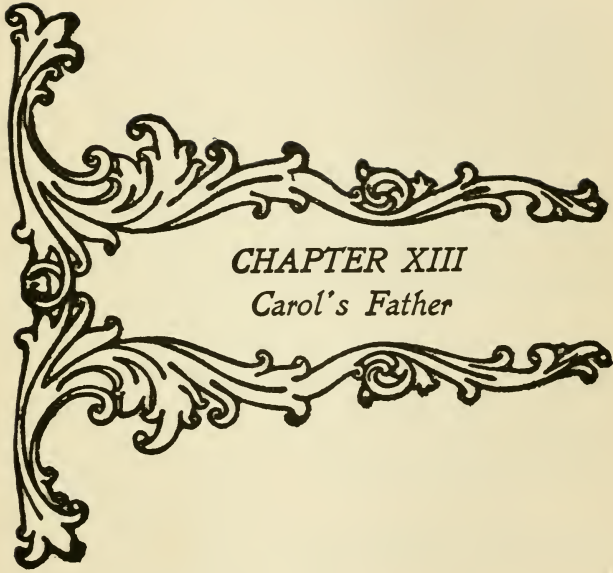
"But we haven't decided when to have it."

"How will a week from next Saturday do?" asked Beth.

"I reckon we can be ready then," answered Harvey, who had been appointed master of ceremonies. "And I'll stay with you to-night, Beth."

Her face brightened, but still she demurred. "It's a shame ——"

"Really I don't want to go, but the others had better go to talk up the show as you suggest."



CHAPTER XIII

Carol's Father

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Carol's Father

AFTER the others had departed, Harvey and Beth went to the kitchen with the idea of popping corn. They found Maggie sitting in front of the fire, bent way over and looking very miserable for her usually smiling self.

"Law, honeys, I done got de misery in my jints so's I jes' can't walk," she announced. "I'se powerful bad, an' if it warn't fer leavin' yo' two alone, I'd go up to bed."

"Where are Gustus and Lizzie?"

"I done reckon as how dat scamp of a Gustus sneaked off after de odders. He thinks a power of gabbin' wid de hotel help, an' Lizzy likewise. Dat's why we're 'lone. Oh, gracious me, dat knee of mine is jes' ter'ble."

"You go right to bed, Maggie. Indeed you must go," commanded Beth.

"Dar nebber wuz sech a bossy chile as yo', honey, but I 'specs I'll have to 'bey yo'." She arose as if really reluctant; nevertheless, her face brightened perceptibly.

"Of course, you will," and Beth pushed Maggie out into the hall, slamming the door after her. "Now for the corn, Harvey."

When the corn was shelled, and some was popping, a timid knock sounded at the kitchen door.

"Who can it be?" whispered Beth, inclined to be a little startled.

"We'll see," answered Harvey, boldly opening the door. Beth caught a glimpse of a tow-head without.

"Carol sent me."

"What does she want?" demanded Beth.

"The baby's sick," blurted out the child.

"Oh," gasped Beth, unprepared for new trouble.

"An' maw wants some of you uns to come."

Beth was only undecided a moment as to what should be done.

"Harvey, as there's no one to go but us, we'll have to go ourselves."

"But Beth, you're not strong ——"

"I am strong, and we're going, so you needn't argue. We'll not say a word to Maggie. We'll take the kitchen key with us."

In a few minutes Beth and Harvey were ready to accompany the child, and the three started, locking the door behind them.

The night was dark, intensely dark. Dense clouds had gathered hiding all the stars, and the feeling of rain was in the air.

"We'll get lost, it's so dark," said Beth.

"I could shut my eyes, an' get to hum," said the child, starting down the hill just ahead of the others.

When they had only gone a short distance, Beth stumbled, almost falling over the root of a tree.

"You'll have to be helped," said Harvey, running to her aid.

"It is a little rough for me," she acknowledged.

The child alone was sure of her footing. Harvey and Beth had to go cautiously, but finally managed to reach the foot of the hill in safety.

"How strange," said Beth pausing. "I didn't know that birds sang at night. Don't you hear it too?"

"That hain't no bird. That's Carol singin' to the baby," announced the child.

"It sounds more like a bird," persisted Beth.

"She likes to try an' sing like the birds."

"Harvey," whispered Beth, "I don't know much about music, but it really seems quite wonderful to me."

"It's very pretty indeed. I'm surprised," he answered.

So was Beth, and a new plan for Carol began to form in her mind, but she moved on in silence to the cabin which was dimly lighted.

Seated by the hearth in which was a smouldering fire dying gradually out, was Carol trying to quiet the baby with her singing. The children were sleeping while Mrs. Cornwell anxiously watched the door. As the children entered, she raised herself on her elbow.

"Whar's yer paw? This is work fer a man," she cried shrilly.

"Hush, maw, hush," cautioned Carol. "Ye're makin' 'Liz'beth restless agin."

Mrs. Cornwell paid no heed to the warning. She was evidently greatly excited. Her eyes burned unnaturally bright, and she wrung her hands in nervous agitation.

"I kin stand hit no more," she moaned. "I know now whar Sam'el goes. I won't stand hit no more. Yer paw shall be told." Her voice was growing shriller every moment. "That's why I sent fer you uns. I 'spected he'd come 'stead of sendin' you uns."

"We were told that the baby was sick and ——"

"That's only part true. I'm so flighty over Sam'el that I make 'Liz'beth restless. That's all, an' I used hit as a 'scuse so's I could tell yer paw—if he don't know hit already—how licker's sold in his house."

"My father will stop it in a minute if you can prove it," Beth said.

"I can't prove hit 'cept that Carol seen him—Sam'el—comin' dead drunk from thar. He's prob'ly thar now. I wish we had some one to spy on 'em."

"He's there. I heard him agree to meet a man there at eight," answered Harvey, the words of the afternoon flashing into his mind.

She looked him over critically. "Yer be pretty small, but I wish yer dared go to make sure. Will yer go?"

"I'll go," he promised.

The sick woman was flighty and hardly realized what she was proposing.

"Yes, yes, do go. Take Brune with yer."

"I'll go too," put in Beth.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," answered Harvey. "You wait here."

She insisted, but he would not consent.

"Go with him, Brune," Carol commanded, waking the dog from where he slept on the hearth.

"He might make a noise, and ——"

"Yer jes' say, 'quiet, Brune, quiet,' an' he'll make no noise."

The companionship of the dog, because of the darkness, was acceptable to the boy.

"Whew, but it's dark," he said outside, keeping Brune close beside him. He was not familiar with the path down to the railroad track, and lost his way several times, so that he stumbled over the roots of trees, skinned his shins, and repented of his undertaking although he would not turn back.

At first he was not frightened, but, when almost at the railroad track, a sudden noise below him started his heart beating at a great rate.

In a moment he smiled over his own cowardice.

"The idea of my being afraid of the croaking of frogs," he thought, "but at first I didn't remember there was a pond down there."

However, with fear once aroused, there was soon new food for it to feed on. Arrived at the railroad track, Harvey paused abruptly, for he thought he heard people talking down by the house at the foot of the embankment. Brune, too, growled, which assured Harvey that people were below.

"Quiet, Brune, quiet," he cautioned, and the dog immediately settled down obediently beside Harvey.

Harvey would have liked to whistle as did Gustus when scared, but realized that unless he kept his approach quiet, he could not hope to accomplish anything. Although he acknowledged that the task before him frightened him, still he would not turn back.

Notwithstanding his trepidation, he quickly thought out what should be done. He had often walked along the track up this way, and knew the embankment to be very steep, almost perpendicular in fact, but to find out anything he must get down it some way. He realized that even the underbrush and rocks just below the upper ledge which had been filled in to make the roadbed, might send him head foremost right into the midst of the men, for it was impossible to see a foot around him. Nevertheless, he

was bound to carry out the adventure to a finish.

Cautiously as he could, he started downward. In a moment he heartily repented the attempt. The loose sand around him giving way, he was carried irresistibly along with it. Brune, too, was caught in the downward avalanche, but, being surer-footed, stopped himself the sooner. Harvey grabbed hold of a bush which broke his wild flight momentarily, but the dirt rattled on downhill making considerable noise.

As Harvey clung breathlessly, his weight uprooted the bush, again sending him sprawling downward. In desperation he reached out wildly, and was held a second by a good sized boulder, until it loosened also and went clattering to the foot of the hill.

In a moment Harvey grasped another bush thus succeeding in gaining his feet. All hopes of finding out anything seemed over, for the avalanche of rattling dirt and rocks would have scared people into hiding if they had any cause for so doing, and Harvey decided to return to the cabin for Beth. But when he let go of the bush to take a step upward, the way proved so steep that he realized that he would have to go to the foot of the embankment and walk around by the road to the track. So down the hill he and Brune continued, and soon they were on level ground again right back of the house that

had been arousing so much suspicion of late. Harvey drew a deep breath, and paused a moment to steady his nerves which were still decidedly shaky. All was perfectly quiet now.

"We can't find out anything, but let's have a look at the place anyway," he said to the dog.

Not the least sign of life did he find near the house, and so he was ready to return.

"Come on, Brune," he called, for the dog had wandered from his side.

At the same instant Brune whined and began yelping.

"What is it, old fellow?" For an instant he thought the dog had made some discovery, until Brune quieted down so suddenly that Harvey concluded he had but scented game which he would not hound at night.

Harvey was about to walk on when a sound as of a smothered groan stopped him.

"Brune," he called, "Brune," but the dog did not come running in response.

For the second time the same mysterious sound broke the stillness, and Harvey began to feel decidedly nervous. The groan evidently came from some human being in distress, and in the darkness and loneliness of the spot suggested horrible possibilities to Harvey who knew not whether to run or to try to solve the mystery. As the groans did not cease, he decided that he could not leave any human being in such misery, and Brune

would probably come to his aid if he needed assistance. Harvey, therefore, advanced cautiously, guided by the cry that was not far off.

All at once he almost stumbled over a prostrate form, and then he saw that Brune was keeping guard close by.

"Don't take me, don't. I have nothin' to do with sellin' whisky. I swear hit," groaned the figure on the ground almost incoherently while between every sentence there was a groan.

Harvey's courage returned. He saw that the man on the ground was not only hurt, but for some reason was afraid of him.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"A lot of we uns were yonder when we heard the officers——"

"What officers?"

"You revenue officers——"

"There are no revenue officers that I know of. What do you mean?"

"Didn't you uns come down the hill? Hain't you uns revenue officers?"

"No, indeed, and only Brune and I came down the hill."

"Only Brune and you?" the man repeated and then began cursing.

"Hush. Do hush," cried Harvey greatly shocked. As the man did not heed him he added, "I'll leave you if you don't stop."

"Yer've got to help me. I'm hurt. When we ran ——"

"Why did you run? What were you afraid of?"

The man did not pay the least attention to the questions. "I caught my foot an' over I went. I tried to get up but I can't stand on my foot. Hit's awful bad. I jes' had to groan when my dawg Brune ——"

"Your dog?" repeated Harvey. "You are Samuel Cornwell then, Carol's father?"

"What yer know 'bout Carol?"

"My friend, Beth Davenport ——"

"Ye're one of the 'ris'crats on the hill then," muttered Cornwell. "If I wasn't hurt, I'd see yer damned 'fore I asked anythin' from yer or yer kind. But now yer've got to help me get hum, or it'll be the worse fer yer." He was inclined to be quarrelsome for he was evidently under the influence of liquor. "Yer got to get me a horse to carry me. Can't walk," he muttered doggedly. Evidently he did not recognize Harvey who decided to say nothing of the meeting in the afternoon.

"You must try to walk," commanded Harvey, believing that perhaps drunkenness kept him from rising.

Cornwell obediently rose, but sank back with a groan so very real that Harvey was assured that he was not shamming.

"Hain't no use. Yer reckon I'd be here if I could gotten 'way?"

Harvey, hardly knowing what to do, tried very hard to plan some way to get Cornwell home.

"If I bring a mule, do you think you'll be able to ride?" he asked presently.

"If yer'd help me up, I'd ride all right."

Harvey decided to go for Rueur. "I'll be back in a short time," he promised. As he started away, Brune would have followed, had not Cornwell called gruffly:

"Here, Brune, yer stay right here with me." And then he swore at the dog so vigorously that Harvey thought it might be right to leave him to his suffering had it not been for his wife's anxiety.

As Harvey hurried along the road, it came to him again how Gustus always whistled or sang to keep the "spooks" away.

"It's so dark, to-night, he'd have to make an awful noise to keep up his courage at all," thought Harvey.

He knew that he would have no difficulty in getting the mule, as the Davenports' barn was never locked even at night, and he felt sure that Beth would approve of his taking her pet.

"Rueur is figuring quite a good deal in 'speciences,' as Beth would say," he thought later, when he had the mule saddled and was on the way back.

"I 'lowed yer was gwinter stay all night," complained Cornwell as Harvey dismounted beside him. Harvey considered such a complaint unfair, as he had hurried as fast as possible.

"Dunno how I'll make it. My foot hurts powerful bad, an' I feel mighty shaky," he continued, nevertheless with Harvey's aid he managed to swing up into the saddle.

Cornwell appeared so decidedly "shaky" that Harvey decided to lead Rueur. Brune trotted along beside him, and thus they made their way slowly back to the hut in the hollow.

"The ole woman 'lows that I drink," Cornwell muttered confidentially, as Harvey helped him down. "'Course she's 'staken, but she'll kinder go fer me jes' the same, but yer watch an' see how I fool her."

Harvey tied Rueur, and then helped Cornwell inside.

"Drunk agin," cried Mrs. Cornwell at sight of the staggering man. She sprang up in bed, and her fever-lit eyes flashed. "If I war 'round thar'd be no carryin' on like this, Sam'el Cornwell. I'd not have hit. Yer'd have to do some-thin' fer yer young uns or go not to cum back."

Cornwell sank down on the nearest chair. "Don't 'cite yerself, Maria. Hit's a right pooty evenin'. Too pooty to 'cite yerself."

"Sam'el," and his wife began to sob, "I ——"

"Oh, shut up," growled Cornwell. "I'm hurt.

Help me off with this boot. Hit hurts powerful bad," he added to Harvey.

The foot was so swollen that with great difficulty the boot came off. His suffering somewhat appeased his wife.

"Carol, get a bucket of water an' let yer paw soak his foot," she said in milder tones. "Then yer kin come to bed, Sam'el. I'll not talk 'til mornin'."

Beth rose from her seat beside the fire. Her heart was heavy, which was even worse than being so tired.

"We'll go if you don't need us any more," she said.

"Dunno as thar's nought yer kin do," muttered Mrs. Cornwell. "Dunno as thar's nought noan kin do."

Outside the two children breathed a little freer, although what they had just witnessed made more apparent, more horribly real, the awful effects of sin than anything they had ever experienced.

"You ride up the hill," proposed Harvey in a hushed voice, and he helped her into the saddle. Then he walked along by her side.

Beth was too deeply stirred even for questioning, and Harvey was not talkative, so in unbroken silence they proceeded.

Fireflies alone indicated that there was other life still in the universe. Every once in a while

little flashes of light relieved the pitch darkness of the sleeping world. Beth wished that she might see some such flash of light in the darkness that enveloped the Cornwell family, but search as she would, she could find none.

"Oh, Harvey, what is to become of them?"

He had no answer. No flash of light shone to his sense for the wretched family in the hollow.

All night he dreamed of revenue officers chasing illegal distillers. In fact he thought himself an officer, and such a capable one that finally all drinking in Tremont ceased.

The subject had taken such a strong hold of his mind that in the morning, immediately after breakfast, he started down to the railroad to see where he and Brune slid down the embankment. He felt sure of finding the spot by the uprooted bushes and stone. Before starting out, he related to the family the adventure of the night before.

At the track he met Marian who was returning from an errand, and she joined Harvey.

"Here's the very spot," called Harvey, excitedly. "I'd never have dared go down in daylight. It's even steeper than I thought."

"It's a wonder you didn't break your neck," declared Marian, shuddering to think that he had been so foolhardy.

"Why, there's Brune," called Harvey suddenly. "I wonder if he's come to see what a wonderful feat we accomplished last night."

"And there's Carol!" exclaimed Marian.
"Hello, Carol!"

The mountain girl who was still half hidden by underbrush, had not noted them or heard their voices until Marian called, although she was climbing nearer to them quickly and easily.

"Why don't you go on a little farther where it's not so steep," called Harvey, thinking of his own experience.

"Law, this hain't nothin'." And to show that she meant it, she climbed the steep embankment with as little effort as many people walk on level ground.

"I hain't lived on the side of a mountain so long a time fer nothin'," she boasted as she halted beside them without the least lack of breath.

"What have you there, Carol?" questioned Marian, indicating a jug that the girl was carrying. Carol hung her head.

"Is it molasses?" continued unsuspecting Marian.

Carol shook her head. "I done wish hit war merlasses," she muttered. "Hit wouldn't do no harm as this 'll."

All at once, it flashed through Marian's mind what the jug contained.

"You shouldn't go for liquor for your father. Where did you buy it?" demanded Marian eagerly.

Carol continued to hang her head. "I darsen't tell. He'd kill me."

"Who? Your father?"

Carol did not answer.

"You got it from that house down there," Marian continued eagerly, pointing to the house in the shadow of the railroad embankment. "I know you got it there."

Carol looked up in surprise. "How'd yer know? Did yer see me?"

Marian was exultant. Her father could now stop the illegal sales, she thought.

"You must come right along up to the house with us, Carol."

The mountain girl held back, until Marian insisted with so much vigor that she had no choice but to obey.

Half-way home, they came across Mr. Davenport who was just returning from the village.

"Papa, they do sell liquor in your house," cried Marian. "Carol just bought some there. It's here in this jug." She pointed to the jug as if she feared it contained a viper that might spring out on them any minute.

Carol was growing scared of the scene that she knew awaited her at home if her part in the disclosure were revealed.

"I hain't tole nothin'," she sobbed. "She said she knew I got hit from you uns' house. An' paw'll kill me if he hears of this."

"I'll see that he does not hurt you, but you must tell me just how you got the whisky," answered Mr. Davenport firmly.

Finally, under his searching questioning, she admitted that she had passed money and a jug through a hole into the house, and that the jug had been returned to her filled.

"You let me have that whisky, Carol," commanded Mr. Davenport.

"I darsen't. Paw'd kill me," she repeated.

Mr. Davenport took some money from his pocket. "Here is the same amount you passed in for the whisky, Carol. Take it back to your father and tell him the place has been closed by my order. You will be telling no lie, for I shall immediately demand my lease back. The man will not dare object when he finds out that I know what is going on."

Carol was only too glad to obey. She was old enough to realize that liquor was the great curse on her home life, for all in her family had suffered while her father was under its baneful influence.

"You uns air very good to we uns," she murmured, and then started homeward. Marian walked on a little way with her.

"Can't you talk to your father and get him to do better, Carol?"

"Me talk to him? Hit'd do no good at all. Maw's done talked to him all mornin'." She

walked on a moment in stolid silence, then she had an unexpected inspiration.

"I reckon if yer'd talk to paw hit moight do some good. We uns have all tole him how kind you uns have been, an' I reckon he moight listen to yer this afternoon when he's sobered up. Will yer come down?"

Marian's breath was so taken away by the proposition that she stopped perfectly still. Carol looked at her wistfully waiting for an answer.

"If—if I can come I will," gasped Marian finally, and then fled toward home.

Carol's words, "hit moight do him some good," kept ringing in Marian's ears.

"'Hit moight do him some good,'—what possible good could I do?" she wondered in a petulant mood. "I wouldn't know what to say. I hate to go. I won't go."

But although she declared this over and over to herself, conscience finally drew her down to the hut rather late in the afternoon. She took Duke with her as she felt a little less timid with him near.

"I can't say a word to Carol's father," she said to herself at the door of the hut. "It's no good at all my coming."

She was more than half inclined to return without letting her coming be known, but Carol, who had been on the lookout for her all the afternoon, spied her before she could sneak away.

"I knew yer'd come," she cried, running out, and then she led poor, trembling Marian within. Duke followed.

"Howdy," said Mrs. Cornwell from the bed. "Carol said as how yer'd come, an' we've all been 'spectin' yer. Sam'el, here's one of the young ladies from the hill come to see yer."

He sat with his back to Marian. When he found that he could not get liquor, he had consented to drink some coffee prepared by Carol, and afterward he had eaten something, so that now he was perfectly sober and in a somewhat chastened mood, because he had been unable to escape the lecturing of his wife.

"Howdy," he grunted, but did not turn to look at Marian.

Duke walked over beside Mr. Cornwell and sniffed at him. Carol had inherited her fondness for dogs from her father. When in his right mind, he was always good to animals, and now he responded to Duke's advances by patting his head. To Marian's surprise, Duke did not resent the attention. As a rule, Duke did not make friends so easily, especially with strange men.

"Duke sees that I'm trying to be friendly, and he's helping me," Marian decided.

Carol had drawn a chair near to her father for Marian, but seated in it Marian felt more uncomfortable than ever. She was even more tongue-

tied than she had feared. She could think of absolutely nothing to say.

"That's a *moighty* val'ble dawg, paw," said Carol finally to break the embarrassing silence. "How much was hit yer sister tole me yer paw was willin' to giv' for him 'fore the man made a present of him to yer sister?"

Marian could talk on this subject. "I've forgotten just what papa offered, but the man who gave Duke to Beth had an offer of a hundred dollars for him, but would not take it. And we've been offered big prices for him, too, but we wouldn't think of selling Duke, for we love him too much. Once in Jacksonville, he was stolen, and papa got him back by giving a large reward."

Samuel Cornwell eyed Duke with new interest. "I reckon if I had a dawg worth that much, I'd sell," he muttered, "tho' I do 'low some dawgs air better than mankind," he added, and then settled back into a gloomy silence.

Bashfulness once more seized upon Marian. Carol rose, and walked over to 'Liz'beth who was whimpering slightly, and patted her until she was quiet. On her way back, she paused a moment beside Marian.

"Paw's 'shamed of hisse'f. Talk to him," she whispered.

Marian felt more like sinking through the floor than ever. She could not have done what Carol

wished, at the moment, not even if she had been assured that by so doing Samuel Cornwell would be saved from drink forever. The silence was most embarrassing, notwithstanding which Marian had not the power to break it. She wondered why she had come when she felt beforehand that she could do no good.

"They'll blame me if I leave without saying anything, but I just can't say a word," she thought miserably.

"Yer know yer paw owns this place, an' we hain't any money to pay this month," sighed Mrs. Cornwell.

"An' I reckon he'll be turnin' us out next," added Samuel Cornwell fiercely, facing Marian for the first time.

The cords of her tongue loosened. Her eyes were pathetic in the intentness of her feelings. "I know my father'll not be hard on you, and if you'd only work, he'd give you plenty to do."

In answer he laughed harshly. "I hain't no sort of good at workin' land, an' no one'll trust me to work at my trade."

"What is your trade?" Marian hoped to discover something whereby he could be helped, and in her excitement she clasped her hands nervously.

"'Fore I—I——" He almost said "before I drank," but suddenly grew ashamed of his sin in the presence of his visitor. "I was a carpenter

years gone by, but when we uns came up this here way thar war nothin' fer me to do 'cept plough rocky land, an' I hain't cut out fer no sech work as that. I hate hit an' I'll not do hit."

Marian was thinking, "If he's a carpenter, as he says, he's the very man to help us out of our difficulty."

She turned to him with shining eyes. "I've thought of something that you can do to help your family, Mr. Cornwell."

He had not been spoken to in such kindly tones for a long while. He stirred uneasily in his chair, and tried to keep his eyes from her pleading face, but she attracted him to her in spite of himself.

"You know we're getting up an entertainment for the benefit of the baby—your baby, little Elizabeth," continued the pleading, eager young voice. "We're to have it down here, and we need a platform, oh, so much. I know my father would furnish the material if you'd only build it for us. Please say you will, and I'll be so happy. Your family will be so glad to have you working for them. Will you build it for us?"

"Oh, paw," cried Carol.

"Sam'el, I'll forgive a heap if you'll do hit," murmured his wife.

He muttered something about "not bein' pestered with women folks."

"Oh, paw," repeated Carol, on the verge of tears.

"Do it because you want to help," cried Marian, jumping up in her eagerness.

He had fully intended to refuse, but could not withstand the pleading in her face. For a moment he said nothing, until Duke who had risen stood by him as if to add his persuasion to the others. Unconsciously, Cornwell's hand sought the dog's head and rested gently there.

"Well, well," he said gruffly, "seein's how yer want hit so much, an' if my foot's better, an' yer don't pester me no more, I'll do hit."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Cornwell; you're a very nice man. I must run now and tell the others," and Marian departed with a very much lighter heart.

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CHAPTER XIV
The Entertainment

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THE day of the entertainment dawned as bright as even Beth desired. She was awake long before it was time to rise, nevertheless she dressed and hurried down to the kitchen, but, much to her disappointment, Maggie was not yet visible.

"I'll measure out things, anyway," decided Beth. And she bustled around getting out sugar, butter, eggs and other necessary ingredients for cake, and thus Maggie found her. The cook had to rub her eyes to make sure that she was fully awake.

"Law, honey, what yo' doin' in my kitchen dis early? Yo' surely ought to be gettin' yo' beauty sleep so's to look fine for the en'tainment."

"Maggie, it just came to me last night that it would make the affair more socialabler"—she sometimes invented words for her own use—"if we were to furnish 'freshments, so mamma promised that we could have lemonade and cake, and I'm to make the cake myself. Julia and Marian are just to help with frostings. Isn't it too lovely for anything, Maggie?"

Her mammy did not look as enthusiastic as Beth expected.

"Hump," she muttered, "yo' 'specs me to think it too lovely fer anythin' when yo' come 'round so early in de mornin' mussin' my kitchen all up? How yo' 'specs I'se to get breakfas' if yo's under my feet?"

"Now Maggie, dear ——"

"I ain't dear nothin'. I'll not have it, an' yo' might as well get out of my kitchen firs' as las'. So go 'long wid yo'."

Beth knew there was no arguing with Maggie when in her present mood. The cook was the autocrat of the kitchen, and if she persisted in her waywardness there would be no cake served that day.

"Just as you say, Maggie," Beth answered meekly, knowing well how best to attain her ends, "but you do want the entertainment to be a success, so please help me with the cakes after breakfast. There's a dear."

"Hump," muttered Maggie for the second time, but she was almost smiling now. "We'll see later," she added as Beth was leaving, so that Beth knew that she had carried the day.

Mr. Davenport was the next member of the household to arise.

"Papa, let's take a walk down to the hollow," proposed Beth. "Maggie is just starting breakfast and so we have plenty of time. I want to

make sure the platform is done. You know it wasn't quite finished last night, but Mr. Cornwell promised to work at it this morning."

As they started down the hill, she continued, "Wasn't it fine for Marian to think of his helping us? He's done extra well, too. You said so yourself, and I want you to get him work."

He smiled at her eagerness. "We'll see how sober he keeps."

"He'll have to keep sober now that they've stopped selling liquor at your house."

He would not tell her so, but he knew there were other ways for a drinking man to get liquor even in a "dry" town.

"Beth," he said to change the subject, "you have us all guessing what you've planned to have Carol do this afternoon."

She smiled up at him brightly. "That's a great secret. It was very hard to get her to promise to do it, but now that she has, I think you'll all like what she does, if she doesn't get scared. I don't know much about s—— Oh, there, I most told you—but I think she does 'it' pretty well. Isn't it a lovely day?" she cried changing the subject for fear she might unwittingly betray her secret, and she pranced on ahead so full of joy was she over the prospects of the day before her.

Soon she saw Carol and her brothers and sisters standing on the platform Mr. Cornwell had built.

"Hit's all done," called Carol up to her. "Paw got up very early an' went to work, but the minute he wuz through, he started right off, an' maw's worried fer fear——" She stopped abruptly as she did not wish to cast any shadow over Beth on this day of all days. "I'm so glad the sun is shinin'," she added as Mr. Davenport and Beth drew near.

Beth's face fairly beamed. "Everything's going beautifully. We were worried about Julia's dress not coming, but she finally got it on last night's train. It had gone to Asheville by mistake. You just ought to see all our dresses. We all have new ones and they're beauties. Come up some time this morning and I'll show them to you."

A shadow that Beth did not notice, fell over Carol's face and, as the mountain girl was still intent on keeping all trouble from her, she gave no voice to the matter that had just made her heart heavy.

Not until Beth and her father had departed, did she give way to her feelings. Then she sank down on a step of the platform and her head sank dejectedly into her hands.

"What's the matter, Carol?" asked one of the children eyeing her curiously.

"Nothin'," she answered dully, and then added crossly, "Go 'long, every one of yer. I hain't in no mood to be bothered by any of yer."

"Carol!" called her mother at the moment, "'Liz'beth's cryin'. Come an' take her."

She choked the sob that contracted her throat; wiped the tears from her eyes, and then went for the baby.

With 'Liz'beth once in her arms, she hurried outside beyond the sight of any one, and then sank down on a log. She no longer tried to still the tempest that was raging within. With her charge held very close, her tears fell on the whimpering child.

"Hit's most fer yer I mind," she sobbed. "I can't take yer the way yer air, an' she'll be dreadful dis'pinted. How kin I tell her? How kin I do hit, but I jes' must."

In happy unconsciousness of the trouble she had caused, the morning passed quickly to Beth. Toward noon several fine cakes besides lemon juice and sherbet glasses were borne in triumph down to the hollow. Not until then did Beth wonder why Carol had not put in an appearance.

"Gustus, do you know what's become of Carol?" she asked.

"I ain't seen her, Missy Beth."

She looked slightly troubled. "You must find her for me, Gustus. I forgot to tell her to come up to my room after lunch, and it will spoil the whole afternoon if she don't come. So you must find her for me."

Gustus' eyes rolled tragically, for he was very

much interested. "Don't yo' worry, Missy Beth, fer I'll shurely hav' her thar fer yo'."

Notwithstanding this reassurance, Beth was troubled for fear her surprise for Carol would be spoiled.

"Can't you find her?" she cried eagerly, when Gustus came into the dining-room toward the close of the noonday meal, looking very hot and uncomfortable.

"Ain't found her yet, Missy Beth, but I jes' came to tole yo' dat she wuz seen up disaway wid de baby, but she's nowhars 'bout now as I kin see."

Tears came into Beth's eyes. "How could I forget to tell her to come up?" she murmured dispiritedly.

"Never mind, Beth, she's sure to be found. Go up and dress yourself, and by the time you're ready Gustus will have found her," said Marian, trying to hold a cheerful view of the situation, although she, too, was disappointed that the mountain girl was not on hand, knowing the surprise Beth had in store for her.

On the way up-stairs Beth was only a little cheered, for if Carol were not found her own pleasure in her own new gown would be spoiled. She opened the door of her room more quietly than ordinarily.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, surprised and greatly pleased. Carol, with 'Liz'beth in her arms, was

seated in a rocker facing the south window. She jumped to her feet, pressing 'Liz'beth convulsively to her breast, and held her there with one arm while she raised the other to brush some tears from her cheeks.

"Carol, what's the matter? You mustn't cry on the afternoon of your entertainment," Beth cried, rushing over beside her protégé.

Carol was too embarrassed and too miserable to speak. She sobbed outright. Then 'Liz'beth began to whimper, and the two cried together.

Beth was at her wits' end. It was time to be dressing, and she knew not what to do to cheer her two guests, and then there was Gustus hunting Carol. He, too, should be getting ready.

"Maggie," she called, running to the head of the stairs, "Carol's up here. Please call Gustus and tell him to get ready."

"All right, honey."

"Now see here, Carol, this will never do," continued Beth, once more going over beside her. "If you and 'Liz'beth cry, the people will see it this afternoon."

"No, they won't," burst out Carol between sobs. "You uns'll hate me fer hit, but——" sobs choked her so that she could not go on.

Beth was getting desperate. "Stop this minute, Carol, and tell me what's the matter."

"'Liz'beth an' me hain't to take part. We can't do hit."

Beth sank down on a chair. "Not take part? You must."

Carol shook her head stubbornly, but said no more. Whereupon Beth jumped up and put her arms around the girl.

"You wouldn't spoil everything, Carol? Now let me take 'Liz'beth while you dry your eyes. We must dress."

Carol clung more steadfastly to the baby. Her lip trembled pathetically, while she gulped down her sobs.

"That's hit," she murmured. "'Liz'beth an' me hain't anythin' to ——" She paused ashamed. "You uns won't understand, but I can't disgrace yer even though yer thinks hit pride, an' I hain't no money to buy new things. Yer wouldn't want us to 'pear in these duds, would yer?"

With light as to the cause of Carol's refusal to take part, joy flooded Beth's soul. She tore over to the bed, and seized a pretty white gown that lay next to her own.

"Oh, I'm so glad we thought of it!" she cried, turning a beaming face toward the puzzled girl in the room with her. "I'm so glad I'd most outgrown it, aren't you?"

"Glad?" repeated Carol, more puzzled. "Hit am jes' grand, but hit looks rale small fer yer."

Beth laughed outright. With the dress thrown over her shoulder, she seized Carol, still with the baby, and tried to whirl her around.

"So you like it? I think it'll just fit you, Carol."

"Fit me?"

"Yes, it's for you." Beth let go her hold to watch the effect of her words.

Carol's eyes almost popped out of her head. To her the idea of possessing anything so dainty as the dress in question seemed incredible.

"Me—me to have hit?" she gasped, hugging the baby so tight that its wizened face puckered until it was on the verge of crying again.

"Of course, you're to have it, if you care for it."

"Care for hit?" and then Carol burst into tears once more.

"Why, what's the matter now?" Beth was afraid she was hurt over being offered second-hand clothing.

"I never 'spected nothin' so grand after we uns heard our money warn't comin'," she answered between sobs, and while she patted 'Liz'beth.

"It isn't a bit too grand for you." Beth was overjoyed at the success of her surprise. "Lay 'Liz'beth on the bed while you and I dress, and you can look over these other things I have for you."

Still Carol hesitated. Her face was again downcast.

"What's the matter now?" Beth cried, noting her expression.

Carol hung her head. "I—I was only wishin' hit would go on 'Liz'beth. Couldn't we pin hit on her so hit wouldn't look bad? I don't mind 'bout myself if she looks perat-like."

Beth was ashamed of her momentary impatience. "You're a dear, unselfish girl, and I'm a very thoughtless one. I've ——"

"You're the best I ever knowed," murmured Carol, with her eyes slightly dim.

Beth drew her over toward the bed.

"Mrs. Morton was the one to think of them," she said, but Carol could not imagine what she meant until Beth grasped an armful of dainty white from the bed and added :

"She sent North for these for 'Liz'beth. They belonged to her baby, and at first she thought she couldn't part with them, but now she really wants 'Liz'beth to wear them to-day, and you're to own them afterward, too."

"Oh," gasped Carol. Her heart was full to running over, still she had no words to express her joy. She could only stand and eye her wondrous gifts reverently, not daring yet even to touch them.

"Are you really pleased?" asked Beth, fearful that Carol did not fully appreciate Mrs. Morton's generosity. "What shall I say to Mrs. Morton for you, or will you thank her yourself?"

"That's hit. I kin never find words to make

her know how I feel, but maybe yer kin tell her fer me."

"How do you feel, Carol?"

For a moment she could not answer. Only after a struggle did she voice her joy.

"I feel like 'Liz'beth an' me was bein' clothed in heavenly white. I heard a sermon 'bout bein' clothed in the white the Bible tells 'bout," she explained, and now that wonder had given place to joy in her expression, Beth was more than satisfied. Carol gained courage and stepped nearer to the treasures, and even touched some of the lace, but very carefully, as if it were of a cobwebby nature that might be hurt by a touch.

"I understand how Mrs. Morton feels 'bout any one wearin' her baby's clothes," she continued, "an' hit am powerful good in her to let we uns have 'um, an' please tell her fer me I'll always be very careful when 'Liz'beth has 'um on jes' like people air of their clothes at meetin'. They're so grand I'll always hav' that feelin' 'bout um anyway."

Beth wished that Mrs. Morton could see and hear her, but she intended to do her best describing Carol's joy. She was sorry she could not talk more on the subject, but she knew it was time for them to be dressing.

"Maggie, will you come up and dress 'Liz'beth?" she called, running to the door.

Carol looked wistful. "Let me dress her. I'd jes' love to do hit."

Beth shook her head. "You'll not have time. We must get ready ourselves while Maggie's fixing her."

A moment later Maggie came puffing into the room and took the baby from Carol.

"Hump," she muttered, and then added, "I'm jes' 'cited to know what yo' thinks ob all dese gran' new fixin's, an' ob my little missy here fer gettin' so many frills for yo' an' de chile. Eh, tell me dat now?"

"Maggie, don't bother us," begged Beth, coaxingly.

Carol looked up into the black face wistfully. "She's—she's powerful good," she faltered as much at a loss for words as she had been a few minutes before when thinking of Mrs. Morton's kindness. Then, overcoming her bashfulness, she added, "I love her mor'n any one in all the worl' 'less hit be 'Liz'beth thar, an' I only love her more 'cause she needs me so very much."

"Carol, we must hurry," cautioned Beth not wishing Maggie to draw out any more praise for her.

But Maggie was softened, and while she washed and dressed the baby, she thought:

"I 'lowed I knowed all 'bout pooh white trash, an' at firs' I counted Carol as one ob dem, but I reckon I wuz clean 'staken. Dey ain't grateful

an' she certainly am. Maybe my honey lamb knows moah dan her black mammy heah, an' Carol's dif'runt dan I 'lowed."

Meantime Carol had difficulty in dressing herself so intent was she on the transformation that Maggie was bringing about, but as Beth would not allow her to stop in her own toilet, by the time Maggie had 'Liz'beth all arrayed in her new finery, the two girls themselves were ready.

Then Carol gazed with all her might at 'Liz'beth, and the look in her eyes made Maggie's own eyes moist, so that she placed the baby in Carol's arms. Carol held the little one reverently looking down at her charge as if she had an angel direct from God.

"She done has a look jes' like some ob dem maidonnors dat Miss Mary has in de pictures down-stairs," speculated Maggie to herself.

Carol turned to Beth. "Hain't she peart-like? Hain't she sweet? I didn't 'low she could 'pear so grand."

Her enthusiasm touched Beth, although she could not view the baby with Carol's eyes. Beth only saw a wizened child less unattractive than usual because of the neatness, the daintiness of its attire. But to Carol, 'Liz'beth was transformed so that she was actually beautiful.

"Oh, I'll not be scared now," cried Carol as she gazed rapturously, "an' I'll sure do yer proud. Why I could face a lot of"—she paused

for a word sufficiently strong to voice her sentiment, "a lot of bars," she added, "an' not be a mite scared. I'll jes' think of this beaut'ful baby, an' my heart'll clean well over."

"And I never saw you look so nice. The dress fits you as if it were made for you. Why, Carol, you're really pretty in it." Then Beth blushed fearing that the mountain girl might see that never before had she thought her good looking. "It's very becoming," she added in confusion, "but it's because you're so proud and pleased about 'Liz'beth that makes you look the nicest."

"That's hit." Carol was not hurt but pleased.

"Are you ready, Beth?" called Julia at the door. "Marian and Harvey have gone down."

"Come in and let us see how you look," cried Beth. "Oh," she gasped at sight of her little friend. "You look more like a cherub than ever."

Julia, arrayed in a costume she had worn in a flower dance in Florida, stood in the middle of the room, flushing with pleasure over their evident admiration.

"Yo's jes' like a Floridah rose come to life," commented Maggie.

Carol who felt called upon to say something, was decidedly at a loss for words but managed to say, "yer look like a—a—well, rale, rale peart-like."

"I never saw you look better," answered Julia kindly.

Carol held up the baby. "An' jes' see 'Liz'-beth. Hain't she a rale little beauty? We uns air so fine an' we owe hit all to her"—looking toward Beth, "an' to Mrs. Morton. We uns kin never do 'nuff fer um."

"We'd better hurry," interrupted Beth. "Maggie, are you coming down with us?"

Maggie tossed her head. "Law, honey, don't yo' reckon I has to spruce up firs' myself? I'se goin' to wear all de finery I has to do yo' proud. Yes, 'deed, honey, so run 'long wid yo'."

"Lots of people are sure to come. It's such a fine afternoon," declared Julia on the way to the hollow. Summer warmth was in the streaming sunshine but was pleasantly tempered by a cooling breeze.

"To think that the summer is going to be such a nice one when it began so badly for me makes me too happy for anything," cried Beth, skipping joyously ahead of the others. "I've a feeling that only good can come to me now, which makes me glad all the time. I haven't told you, Carol, that papa has promised to take us camping very soon, and perhaps you can come up and visit us."

"Me—me to go campin'? I'd like that powerful well."

"Harvey's having a great time with the curtain," called Marian who saw them coming.

Then they all hurried up on the platform where both Harvey and Gustus were striving to see what was wrong with the ropes strung from two poles by which they meant to slide the curtain draped across the front of the platform.

"They don't go unless we pull them by hand," explained Harvey. "I can't fix them and it's too late to get any one."

"I'll tell you what we'll do then," announced Beth undaunted. "We'll take turns pulling them back. We can hide behind the curtain like this." To illustrate, she drew one half of the curtain back and pulled it around her.

"Put it back quick, Beth. Some one's coming," whispered Marian.

Beth peeked around the curtain. "It's papa and mamma. They're to receive the people, you know. Papa'll fix the curtain for us. No he can't. There come some other people back of them." She hastily ran the curtain into place.

Gustus stood eyeing her wistfully. "Yo' specs they'll like my dancin', Missy Beth?" he asked, as she retreated toward the middle of the stage.

"Of course they will, Gustus." But she was so excited that she paid little attention to him which made him look at her most reproachfully.

"Yo' ain't nebber onct spoke how fine I is, Missy Beth."

She looked contrite. "I'm forgetting heaps of things to-day, Gustus. I just wish your mamma

could see you. She'd hardly know her own son, I believe."

Her mind was traveling back over the years to the time she had discovered Gustus a ragged out-cast. That the boy now before her, neatly dressed and with his black face scrubbed so clean that it was shiny, could ever have been unkempt seemed almost impossible.

"Why wouldn't she know me?" he asked, hungering for flattery.

"Because you look so very, very fine, Gustus," she answered sufficiently enthusiastic to satisfy even him.

With her thoughts turned to the subject of dress, Beth noted that Marian looked unusually well in a shirred gown of pink, and that Harvey appeared very manly even though he wore knee-breeches like the master of a circus ring.

"Lots of people are coming," called Marian with her eyes glued to the parting in the curtain.

"We're going to have a crowd sure," Julia said pirouetting around the stage in her delight.

"I'd better see that the dogs are all right as they're second on the program," said Harvey, running down back of the platform to where they were tied.

Beth, greatly excited, went over beside Marian to peek, too.

"They have to crowd together," she whispered, her eyes shining. "There comes Maggie. Papa's

making room on the front seat for her. My, isn't she fine! She has on that green silk dress that she treasures so. What do you think of that, Marian Davenport? That shows that she takes as much interest as any of us. I really believe she's gotten so that she's fond of Carol, although she hasn't owned it to me."

"It's most time to begin," said Harvey a moment later, bringing a chair up on the platform with him. Beth hustled Carol and the baby over in it. Then she skipped back to the opening to have one last look before they pulled back the curtains.

Her heart leaped convulsively. Every seat appeared to be occupied, and still people were flocking down the hill. Where could they all be seated? she wondered.

Then she saw her father and the minister who had loaned the benches, bring forward some logs across which they stretched planks that had been left from the stage.

Unaccountable fear seized upon Beth. Instead of pleasing her as it had at first, the sea of faces now terrified her. How had mere children like themselves dared undertake to amuse so many people? Notwithstanding the crowd present, the affair would be an utter failure. If they were all as scared as she, they could do nothing as they had planned, and as for Carol, Beth hardly dared think how the crowd would affect her.

"I shouldn't have asked her to take part," thought Beth. "She'll be frightened out of her wits and spoil everything from the very beginning. Why did I insist on having her first?"

She hurried over to Carol and whispered, "Remember, you're to think of 'Liz'beth. You promised me that, and you mustn't get scared."

Carol smiled. "She's so peart-like, I'm thinkin' of nothin' else, an' my heart's singin' in me already."

Beth was not greatly reassured. "Just wait until she sees the crowd, and then she'll think of something else," she thought, and gave a nervous start as the audience began clapping, which only made her more agitated.

"They want us to begin," murmured Harvey.

Beth looked at him and saw that he was pale himself. "He's afraid she'll fail, too," she thought, but she would have been more troubled if she had dreamed that he was nervous on his own account.

"Harvey, they're getting impatient. Go on out," commanded Marian.

After hesitating another moment, he stepped through the opening between the curtains and bowed to the audience. New applause greeted him, and he had to wait for the noise to die down.

"It's all quiet now, why don't he go on with

his speech?" whispered Beth to Julia. "They're waiting, and he shouldn't keep them waiting."

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Harvey, and then stopped.

Once more they clapped, and some one called, "Hear, hear."

Whereupon a dead silence again reigned, while Harvey stood pale and trembling before them. Stage fright had seized upon him so that every word of his speech went from him.

"Carol and the baby 'Liz'beth," he announced, and hurriedly fled back of the curtains.

"Harvey, go out again," implored Beth. "It's a shame for them not to hear that lovely speech you had such a time making up and learning."

But he was deaf to her appeal. "Pull the curtain back," he whispered. "We've told about Carol and 'Liz'beth all over town, so that people will understand just as well."

He began pulling back his side of the curtain, and Beth saw there was nothing to do but draw back her side, too.

Another round of applause followed. Carol looked up troubled, so that Beth feared that stage fright was going to overmaster her also.

"They're clapping because 'Liz'beth looks so sweet," she whispered across to Carol. She never even blushed over the falsehood.

Carol's face immediately lighted up, although tears came into her blue eyes feeling their kind-

ness so deeply. Suddenly she held the baby out so the people could the better see her darling.

"You uns air powerful good," she murmured. The clapping ceased, to hear what she was saying. Beth's heart stopped beating an instant, and then began thumping wildly. That Carol should speak was not down on the program, and Beth greatly feared that she might say something that she should not.

"A nice, kind lady guv these air grand clothes to 'Liz'beth," continued Carol, feeling instinctively that Mrs. Morton would not like her name used, "an' Beth Davenport guv me my dress. If hit—I should say it. She's teachin' me that—if it hadn't been for her, we uns'd hav' starved. I can't tell how good she's been."

"Hush, hush," murmured Beth, overcome, but Carol was so intent on what she had to say that she would not heed.

"She 'lowed that I should sing for you uns. I hain't never had no lessons 'cept from Don—he wuz my robin an' he sung powerful pretty. I don't sing as nice as him, but Beth Davenport tole me to sing jes' as I do to 'Liz'beth here, an' only to think of her. She says as how you uns air so kind, you uns won't mind no mistakes."

'Liz'beth began to whimper while she spoke, and Carol drew the babe closer to her motherly heart. Back and forth she began to sway, rocking the baby, while in her ordinary every-day

way she started a simple little air to quiet her charge, and in a moment or two forgot that people were listening. So quiet were they that the spell was unbroken.

Her words, "I hain't never had no lessons 'cept from Don—he wuz my robin, an' he sung powerful pretty," repeated themselves to Mrs. Morton, and she leaned far forward in her seat to listen.

Carol did more than sing "powerful pretty"; she sang with deep feeling, and, while she plainly lacked cultivation, her voice was so flexible that she took very high notes with little effort. Every word, too, was distinct, and her mountain dialect added to her charm for the Northerners.

The mother-like love revealed in Carol's face, and an undercurrent of sadness in her singing, caused Mrs. Morton's heart to melt so that she sobbed outright. At first the bereaved mother had been stabbed to her soul to see another child wearing her beloved's clothes. But now her personal loss was swallowed up in a great pity, so that she was glad that she was not hoarding her child's finery.

At first the singing only wrought upon her feelings, but when she began to control them somewhat, it came to her that Carol really had a beautiful voice—birdlike in quality—and that it might be cultivated and thus lift the mountain waif out of such poverty.

"That voice should be cultivated," she said to herself.

Until this moment she had thought of Carol as an ordinary little mountain girl, but now it came to her that the child had the divine spark of genius. Not only was there exquisite quality to Carol's voice, but there was feeling in her soul. While singing, understanding, not a child's but a woman's, was vouchsafed her, so that she had something for every soul present. To the joyful she gave added joy ; to the sorrowing, she not only shared their sorrow, but lightened their burden with hope. At least this was the light with which Mrs. Morton heard her sing.

"She's wonderful. How did it ever come to her?" Mrs. Morton wondered, and fearful that her own emotions were playing her false, she tried her best to judge Carol in a purely critical spirit. She knew herself to be a good judge of music, and was surprised when even in a quieter mood her head as well as her heart approved her first decision.

"She's well named. Hereafter, I'll always think of her as 'my little singing girl, Carol.' I feel as if I had made a great discovery. I must give the child a chance," Mrs. Morton promised herself.

Maggie, too, leaned far forward in her seat, and her eyes grew suspiciously moist. Carol's singing carried her thoughts to a grave made

many years before down in Florida, but her loss was not as keen as Mrs. Morton's, for Beth had come into her own life to fill the void.

"De good Lawd bless de chile," Maggie prayed to herself for Carol. "Little missy done know aftah all what she's 'bout, bein' so good to dat gal. She ain't no low white trash, even if her paw am, an' I'll have to make it up to her some way for my unrighteous scorn, dat's what," and Maggie surreptitiously wiped a tear from the corner of her eye.

These two were not the only ones who had their feelings stirred, for other eyes were tear dimmed, and the silence attested that Carol had gained the interest of all.

On and on she sang, for 'Liz'beth was unusually hard to be pacified, and as she sang, a bird—one not native to the region,—swerved in its course and made for a dogwood tree to the left of the stage. And as it lighted, it burst into song as if trying to outrival the human singer.

In an instant Beth's attention was riveted on the bird's song. From her place behind the curtain she could not catch a glimpse of the feathered songster, but she did not need to see, to know that the bird was her own escaped mocking-bird. No other bird in the world, unless it were Don, could sing like that except Dick.

The bird's trilling only lasted a moment, and then away flew Dick, joyful in freedom. But

while he was present Carol had broken off in her singing, and Beth feared the mountain girl might have recognized the intruder and been disturbed thereby. She waited in breathless silence to see what Carol would do.

Many in the audience had seen the bird fly away, nevertheless, a moment afterward doubted its being gone, notwithstanding there was no visible sign of its whereabouts. Search as they did, it was not to be seen, although they thought they heard it, for the trill had been taken up and a repetition of the bird's first outburst was given, and then a repetition with variations.

Some believed the mocking-bird must be hiding behind the curtains for the melody unmistakably came from the stage. This was the solution that Maggie momentarily accepted, until she made a discovery that brought her to her feet, forgetful of everything but the astonishing truth.

"I clah to goodness if it ain't Carol, an' not de mockin'-bird come back," she cried. "Well it beats all, but I reckon dat bird'd be 'ceived hisself if he heard her." She sank back to her seat completely conquered. Beth would nevermore have trouble in getting Maggie to do deeds of kindness for Carol.

The truth gradually forced itself into other minds besides Maggie's, and when there was no doubt whence came the birdlike song, the audience broke into tumultuous applause.

Hastily Carol arose. "Don't, don't," she called, holding up a warning hand. "You're wakin' 'Liz'beth," and then again began singing to quiet her charge.

More because they wished to hear the song than because of her warning, the noise died down, but in a moment 'Liz'beth was again asleep, whereupon Carol turned to leave the stage. Her admirers were ready to break into applause once more, had not Carol, at the first clap of hands, faced them defiantly.

"Hush," she cautioned. "She's sleepin', an' hit's—it's bad to waken her. I'm goin' to take her in to maw," and away she started.

Beth and Harvey began pulling on the curtain to draw it together. Nervousness may have caused them to pull too vigorously, for the rope suddenly gave way and down fell the curtains over them both. In a moment they had twisted themselves out, but were embarrassed to receive a round of applause. The audience needed some outlet for their feelings.

Beth, however, was too delighted with the success of Carol's singing to be uncomfortable long over anything, and catching her father's eye, she called :

"Papa, come up and fix it for us."

Mr. Davenport hastened to the platform. From his own state of mind, he knew there could be no

more auspicious moment than the present in which to open people's purse strings.

"I was not asked to speak," he began facing the audience, "but you all know the object of this entertainment, and that we're to give whatever we wish. It just occurred to me that while I'm fixing the curtain, the children had better take up a contribution," and to set a good example, he gave Beth a bill.

"For Carol," he said.

So the girls took the little baskets tied in green that they had in readiness for the purpose, and Marian and Julia went to the back benches while Beth began at the front.

The very first person that Beth came to was Maggie. Not expecting any donation from her mammy, she started to pass her by. Maggie jumped to her feet as quickly as her "rheumatics" would permit.

"See here, honey chile," she called, and others around listened. "I'm pr'ared to give. I done axed Miss Mary to 'vance me some money dis mornin' for dis very purpose."

"But Maggie," began Beth undecided if it were fair to receive a contribution from a working woman.

"Don't hes'tate, honey. De good book says as how de widow's mite wuz befo 's all. I've no need ob de money, an' dey has," and

with the words she dropped a bill into the basket.

"But Maggie, this is more than a mite," cried Beth.

Her colored mammy drew herself up and pride flashed from her eyes.

"Go 'long, honey. Dat widow's mite wuz only fig'er ob speech wid me. I done always worked for de quality."

Then she reseated herself with a look of conscious well doing. Her words brought smiles to faces all around, while some nodded their approval at her. But better still her example proved contagious, and bills and silver rapidly filled Beth's basket. The other two girls, too, fared almost as well.

"Missy Beth," said Gustus, running to meet her as she was carrying her filled basket back to the platform, "I seen Maggie givin', an' I wants to giv' too. Here's a quartah massa gav' me extra las' week for bein' a good boy, he said, an' I did 'low I'd buy somethin' to take to camp wid us, but I'd ruther they had it now."

Again Beth hesitated. She knew that Gustus sent most of his wages home, and that all extras were very precious to him, so she said :

"You do your share by taking part, Gustus."

"Please, Missy Beth, take de money too for it makes me feel good inside to give it."

She flashed her approval in a smile as the

quarter jingled down among the other coins. She, herself, felt "good inside" and she added •

"I'm very proud of you, Gustus."

This made him so happy that he thrust his hands way down in his pockets, and shuffled his feet around in an irresistible manner.

"I kin do figgers to-day dat'll make dem Northerners' eyes open," he whispered. "I feel jes' like dancin' forebber an' ebber."

The money was placed in Mr. Davenport's keeping.

"I know we've taken up more than any of us expected," said Marian. "We'll have to do extra well now."

"Somebody ought to go out in front and thank them for their goodness. I'll get Harvey," proposed Beth.

"Go yourself," said her father. "You helped collect, and it was your idea having the entertainment."

Again her heart began thumping wildly, but she resolutely walked to the front of the stage, and curtsied.

"I—we want to thank you," her voice trembled, but in a moment she gained confidence so that her words rang clear. "At first I was terribly scared for fear we could not please you, but you have given so much money and liked Carol so well that it will help us to do our best. We thank you very, very much."

Her unaffectedness pleased them and they clapped for her. Again she curtsied and then retired hurriedly.

By this time repairs were finished and the entertainment proceeded without another flaw. Each one of the performers, even to the dogs, did themselves great credit, and received merited praise.

One event of the day that especially pleased Beth occurred at the very end of the performance. Some one called for Carol, and immediately all the audience began calling for her. At first she was so bashful that Beth could not make her acknowledge the ovation, but finally they succeeded in getting her before the curtain where she bowed awkwardly, for without 'Liz'beth she was self-conscious.

"Another bird song from Carol of Carolina," called Mrs. Morton and the words were taken up by many others.

Whereupon Carol rushed in great confusion back of the curtains, but her flight only made them more vociferous in their demands.

"You must sing," Beth commanded.

"I hain't 'Liz'beth here to think 'bout. I can't do hit," she answered so frightened that she could have cried.

"Sing for Mrs. Morton and me," Beth implored.
"It'll spoil everything if you don't sing. Don't

think about yourself, just think how much we want you to sing."

Only a moment longer did Carol hesitate. "I'll do hit fer yer," she muttered through clenched teeth. She was evidently still very much scared, but Beth hoped her grit would help her out, and fearing also that her nerve might fail if she waited another moment, Beth saw that the curtains were drawn back, leaving Carol in the centre of the stage alone.

For a moment she stood looking around helplessly. The clamor subsided, but the stillness so frightened her that she was tempted to fly. Beth read her thoughts.

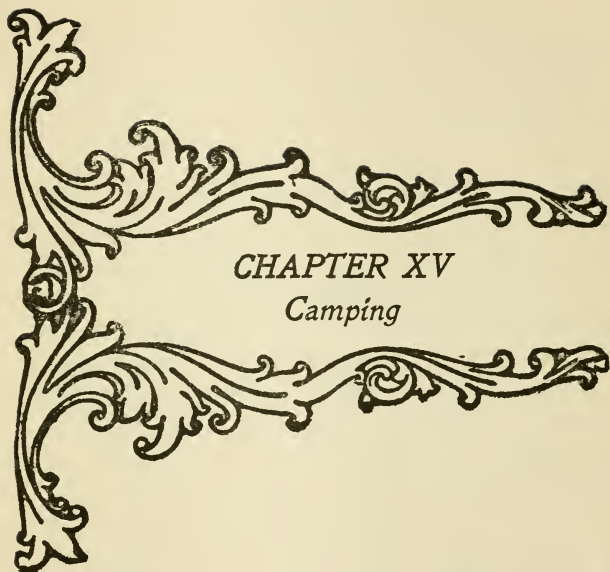
"Do sing," she whispered across to Carol. "Pretend you're Dick come back, and sing like he did for me. If you do, I'll never mind again that you let him go."

The appeal stilled Carol's fright, and she began thinking of the orange groves in Florida that Beth had told her about. She imagined that a new moon was rising over the gleaming river that flowed softly on one side of the grove. She saw two birds side by side on a tree and she pictured to herself how they would talk together in song. With the scene very real in her own mind, she began her song. At first it was very low and sweet, as if the birds feared some intruder might be near by to interrupt their love-

making, but, when the stillness was undisturbed except by themselves, they gained confidence, which the little singer expressed by richer, fuller, higher tones.

Carol brought her wondrous trilling to an end amid a storm of applause, but the sweetest praise to her was when Beth grabbed her and kissed her.

“I’m proud of you, Carol,” she cried. “I had no idea you could do so well. It’s been a grand success, and ‘Carol of Carolina,’ as Mrs. Morton called you, deserves the greatest credit. Hurrah for Carol of Carolina!”



CHAPTER XV

Camping

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ONE bright morning in early June, Beth arose a little after daylight. The most desired wish of her soul was about to be fulfilled. The Davenports were going camping.

Mr. Davenport and Gustus were to drive the five miles to Melrose with a wagon load of baggage and provisions. Harvey and the girls were to go up on the morning train, while Mrs. Davenport and Maggie were to wait until the following morning, when the campers hoped to have everything in fine running order.

Even before the family breakfasted, they began loading the wagon, and by the time Mr. Davenport was ready to start, it seemed impossible to pile on anything more.

"Mamma says we must take these blankets," cried Beth, rushing out breathlessly, almost lost behind the load she carried. "It'll be colder up there than here."

By rearranging the load, the necessary room was secured. Then Maggie appeared with an enormous hamper.

"Hav' yo' done disrec'lected dis?" she demanded. "Yo'd starve sho' dis noon anyways

if all dese goodies were left 'hind. Why, Miss Marian, Missy Beth, Miss Julie an' me worked all day yesterday makin' pies an' cakes an' cookin' chicken an' boilin' ham, 'sides all de fruits an' jellies. De question now am, whar's it to go?"

Gustus' eyes rolled tragically. "Dem goodies sho' got to go."

"Hump," muttered Maggie. "Yo's sech a pig, yo'd walk on yo'r hands, I reckon, 'fore yo'd see anythin' good to eat left 'hind."

Finally the hamper was wedged in front, but in consequence Gustus had to let his feet hang over the side of the wagon.

"We'd better start before you try to load anything more on," said Mr. Davenport, suiting the action to his words.

At this instant Duke bounded around the corner of the house in pursuit of the wagon.

"Call him back, Beth," Mr. Davenport commanded.

"Oh, papa, let him go to camp with you," she begged, running down the road.

"But we decided to leave him home to protect the house."

"Watch will do as well. I tied him up in the barn to make sure he wouldn't follow."

Mr. Davenport smiled over her artlessness. "But you left Duke loose so he would follow. Well, as you want him so much, he might as well go."

"Oh, goody, goody, goody," she cried, dancing up and down on the pine needles. "Don't you let him get lost, Gustus. It would break my heart to lose him."

After this parting injunction, she went down to see if Carol was ready, for it had been planned that she should spend a few days at camp. Beth found Carol unexpectedly downcast.

"The gal to look after 'Liz'beth hain't cum," she announced with a catch in her voice. "If she don't cum soon, I'll have to stay hum."

"Oh, well, then you can come on the train with mamma and Maggie."

Carol's gloom did not lighten. "But I wants to go to-day. I could help a powerful sight."

She struggled to keep the tears back, but felt so badly that she sobbed aloud. Beth was desperate. She had some things to attend to at the house and had no time to comfort Carol, even if she had known how.

"Please, please don't cry. I must go, and it makes me unhappy to have you feel so badly."

"I'll try not to cry," promised Carol, struggling harder than ever to swallow her sobs, and hugging poor 'Liz'beth close in her arms.

"The girl may come. If she does, meet us at the train," called back Beth as she started up the hill.

Even at the house she thought continually about Carol's disappointment. Finally when they went

down to the train, she watched anxiously in hopes that Carol might appear.

Impatient as Beth was to be at camp, she was actually sorry to have the train on time, for no Carol had come.

"It's a shame about Carol," she said, when seated in the car beside Harvey, and a picture of her friend in tears as she had left her, rose to her mind. "I do hope she can come up to-morrow. I don't wonder she feels badly. I'd have cried my eyes out, too, if I'd been in her place."

Only for a moment, however, did Carol's disappointment affect Beth's spirits. She was too bubbling over with the idea of camp life to be long dispirited by anything.

"We're going camping," she confided to the conductor when he came to collect their fare. "We want to get off by the water tank at Melrose. Will you surely let us know when we get there?"

He smiled at her eagerness. "Yes, indeed," he answered.

By this time the engine was putting on extra steam to puff laboriously up the steep mountain grade.

Beth looked troubled. "It's an awful pull for Rueur, and he may balk. Anyway some of the things will spill out, and, if they don't, our cakes and pies and things will all get jumbled together."

"I never knew you to be such a croaker," called Marian from the seat ahead. "Do be quiet and look at the scenery."

Beth did not know which side of the car to choose. On either side were sheer ravines and rugged rocks, while backward lay the peaceful valley. Every tree and bush was clothed in most luxuriant green besides which were many exquisite wild flowers.

Not for long did Beth enjoy the grandeur of the scenery in quiet. From what her father had said of the distance, she thought they should be nearing Melrose.

"Supposing they don't stop at the water tank to-day?" But at that moment she saw the conductor coming, and ran eagerly to meet him.

"Is it time for us to get off?"

Again he smiled over her evident excitement. "We'll be at Melrose in a minute now. You'd better be careful up here in the mountains," he continued, as she skipped along by him toward the door. "If I were in your place I'd never leave camp without a pistol. I do hope you can shoot."

Her eyes grew very big. "Why do I need a pistol?"

He shook his head, while his face appeared very solemn. "The mountains are full of wild beasts, and there are robbers—awful bad ones—up here. They'll be sure to capture such an adventurous

girl as yourself. If there were time enough, I could tell you yarns that would make your blood curdle, and, as for that curly hair of yours, why all the curl would come right out until it stood straight on end."

Beth knew that he must be teasing her. Nevertheless, she grew more and more round-eyed, which incited the conductor to continue.

"Why, right near the spot where you're going to camp——"

"He don't know where we're to camp," Beth reassured herself.

"The wild chief of the robbers is now in hiding. My, but you'll be scared if you come across him. I daren't say what he would do to you. One thing is certain, though, you'd better keep out of his way. I myself would be terribly scared to meet him."

The children alighted a short distance above the water tank, where the conductor took his leave of Beth with the parting injunction:

"Now keep your eyes open. I'd hate mightily to hear of any harm befalling you, but if the chief of the robbers should capture you, don't tell him I warned you against him, or he might hold up my train in revenge."

"He was only fooling, wasn't he? It does look pretty wild up here, though," said Beth, as the train steamed on up the mountain. She gazed at the woods on either side of them apprehensively

as if she feared the chief of the robbers might be lurking behind a tree at that very moment.

"I reckon he really meant what he said," answered Harvey so seriously that both Beth and Julia were half inclined to believe him, notwithstanding his propensity to tease.

"I don't know about the wild animals," he continued, "but there are sure to be robbers bold up in these wilds."

"Don't you believe him. You know how he plagues us," put in Marian.

"Marian's scared, but don't be afraid, girls. I'll protect you."

They laughed good-naturedly over his lordly manner, and walked on.

"Aren't these Rueur's tracks?" cried Marian at the road. "Yes, for here are Duke's, too."

"I can hardly wait to reach the falls. I'm the only one who hasn't seen them," cried Beth, hurrying ahead of the others.

"No use trying to leave us behind," called Harvey. "You'll not know where to turn unless we're with you."

She settled down to the slower pace of her companions as she was losing breath anyway. The road was not particularly steep, but she had done no mountain climbing like the others. On either side were trees and bushes so dense that only once was there an opening for any extended view.

"Hello!" called Harvey, so unexpectedly that Beth was startled.

"Hello," came in answer almost as an echo, and then they heard Gustus say, "They're comin', Massa James."

In a moment Duke bounded out from the bushes to the right of them.

"Are we really there?" demanded Beth, all excited.

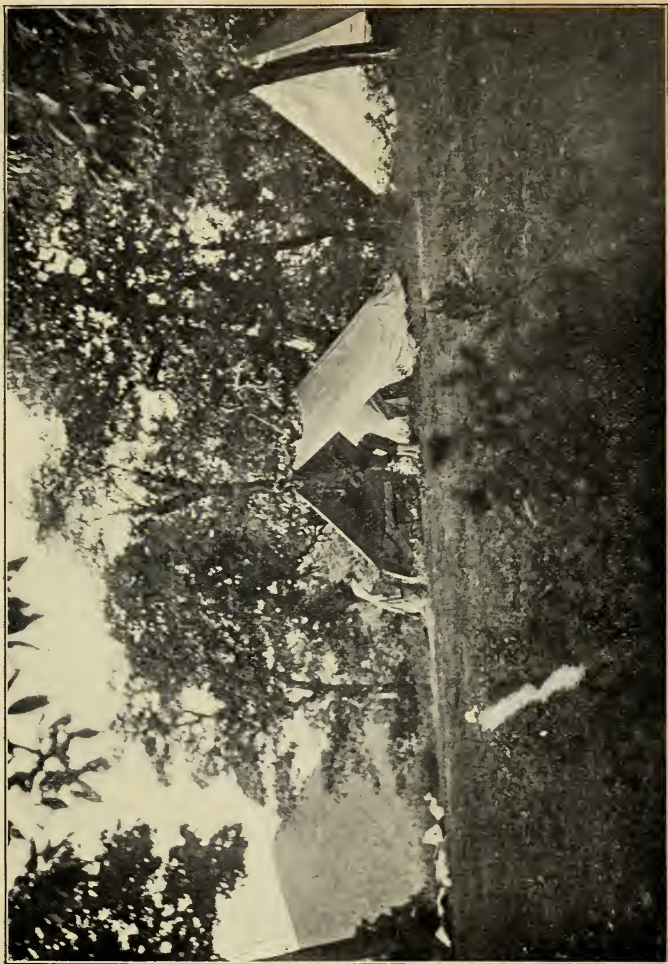
In answer, Harvey led the way through an opening near where Duke had come out. Here were Mr. Davenport and Gustus hard at work, and with them was a mountaineer Mr. Davenport had engaged to help lay the floor for the girls' tent. Already it was half completed, and Gustus had the wagon partly unloaded.

"Are you all ready for work?" called Mr. Davenport.

"Yes, only I'd like to see the falls first. They must be very near for they sound so loud," answered Beth.

"You'll never settle down until you've seen them, so I reckon I'll have to take you to them, and then we'll pitch in and work hard," added Harvey to reassure Mr. Davenport that they did not mean to be idlers.

He started on the path toward the falls, and then Beth skipped ahead of him. In a moment she came to a stream babbling down-hill over a



THE DAVENPORT CAMP

rocky bed, and then looked up to where she heard the sound of falling water.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she cried, in rapture.

She had seen grander falls, but never any more picturesque than these. There was no sheer descent of water but it fell in foaming cascades over ledges of rocks, while on either side of the stream were trees and overhanging shrubs in bloom that were mirrored wherever the water had settled into quietness. Beth caught glimpses of luxuriant ferns and wild flowers under this tangled growth.

"Are you satisfied now that you've seen them?" asked Harvey, after waiting a moment for her to speak.

"Satisfied?" repeated Beth. "Well, I should say so. I could stand here all day watching the ——"

"Stand here all day indeed," he interrupted. "Well, you'll do nothing of the sort. We must get to work right away."

"That's so," she assented, turning back with less reluctance because of her great desire to help toward the settlement of their camp.

"Harvey," said Mr. Davenport, as they returned, "take that extra axe and help Gustus chop down some young spruce trees for the beds."

"And what shall I do?" asked Beth.

"You can help Marian and Julia in gathering

wood. We need a lot both for a bonfire to-night and for our coffee this noon."

Such work was play to the children, and time sped so quickly that they were all surprised when Mr. Davenport called :

"What time do you think it is, children?"

"About eleven," answered Harvey.

"You're no true woodsman or you'd know better. Just look up at the sun and you'll see it's past twelve."

"Well, the only way I'd have believed it is because I'm so hungry," cried Beth.

"I'm ravenous myself," agreed her father. "You girls spread out the lunch and we'll make the coffee," he added, looking at the boys.

Beth tore off the cover from the hamper. "It don't look as if a thing was jumbled. Maggie knows how to pack."

The table-cloth was spread on the ground as there had been no time to build a table as planned—that was to be part of the afternoon's labor, and then the supplies from the hamper were placed thereon in extravagant abundance.

The smoke from the fire curled upward and soon the fragrant aroma of coffee announced that their midday meal was ready. Whereupon they all clustered around the feast down on the sweet smelling pine needles.

Beth heaved a sigh of deep content. "It's so

lovely to be here that it almost seems like a dream."

"This chicken is betteh than any dream I ebber knowed," announced Gustus, who with the mountaineer had been given a helping by themselves.

Never had a meal tasted better to any of them than the one that noon.

"What would Maggie say if she saw how we've made things disappear?" cried Marian, as she arose.

"She'd immediately go to work and bake a lot more goodies to bring up with them to-morrow," answered Beth.

Their afternoon's work proved very satisfactory, and the beds of spruce especially pleased Beth.

"I can hardly wait for night. They're the grandest things to sleep on imaginable," she declared.

"We are pretty fine, I think," agreed Harvey, who had just returned with some milk he had succeeded in getting down near the railroad track.

"Fine," sniffed Beth. "Why we're grand. I wouldn't change this lovely camp for a palace."

Supper was served on the table that had been fixed during the afternoon and all enjoyed the meal thoroughly.

"Now for our bonfire," cried Harvey, as they arose from the ground.

A few moments afterward the flames shot upward, and around the blaze the little party gathered glad of its cheer. All were tired and clouds were gathering which was somewhat dispiriting.

"It looks very much like rain. That's the worst of camp life," said Mr. Davenport, who had been fearful of the clouds for some time.

"Well, if it does rain, we'll go to bed, and the sun will surely be shining in the morning," Beth predicted, with her usual optimism.

She had expected to enjoy this part of the day the most, but on the first night of camp life, she found she was too tired and sleepy to care even for stories. Other nights they could roast things and have a merry time, but now, she thought, bed would be nicer than any jollification. Nevertheless she tried not to show how she felt.

Gustus, on his part, did not stifle his yawns in the least. As he sat before the fire his head nodded every once in a while, and then he would come to himself with a great start.

"Gustus, you make me sleepy," cried Marian as he stretched his arms above his head yawning more loudly than ever.

"I—I—a—w—shurely can't help it, Miss Marian. I nebber wuz so sleepy."

"We're all sleepy," said Mr. Davenport. "We were up so early, and then we've worked pretty hard. What do you say to turning in for the

night and then we can get an early start in the morning ? ”

As he spoke some one felt a drop of rain, and that settled the matter. Into the tents they went, which was a wise move, for soon the drops fell faster and settled into a fine “growing rain,” as Mr. Davenport called it.

“It’s a ’sperience,” said Beth as she undressed.

“Well I’m mighty glad it’s not a wild down-pour like we had on the night we were lost,” answered Julia.

Later when Beth had snuggled down in a particularly comfortable spot, she said, “It’s lovely to lie here so warm and snug and listen to the rain. And the roar of the falls makes me ——”

“Oh, do be quiet, Beth ; I want to sleep,” cried Marian. Julia’s fair head was far down in the pillow, and her regular breathing showed that she was already asleep.

Beth had suddenly grown very wide awake. Over and over in her mind recurred all that they had done during the day, and then she thought over all that she would like to do on the morrow. She did not mind being wakeful. It was lovely just to know that she was up on a great mountain in the woods with beautiful falls roaring, roaring, so very near, and the drip, drip of the rain was nice too, even if the girls would not agree with her in this.

But soon the poetry of the situation was spoiled

for Beth by the rising wind. It made her think of the robbers the conductor told her about.

Suppose they were somewhere near, particularly that awful chief. She wouldn't like him to appear at their camp especially when she was the only one awake. She'd like to call across to the other tent to know if they were sleeping there, only it would make them cross to be awakened, and she felt very sure they were sleeping after their hard work.

Another gust of wind made her draw the bedclothes up over her head and thus she lay slightly trembling. Suddenly she remembered Duke chained over in the "storeroom" where the provisions were.

"If I only had Duke here, I wouldn't be a mite afraid," she thought. "Why didn't I let him sleep at the foot of my bed? I believe I'll get him even now."

No sooner had the idea entered her mind than she arose, and, slipping a blanket around her, started on her mission barefooted.

Outside she found that the rain had increased. The darkness, too, was intense. She almost repented her undertaking, but after having started would not give up. She made a dash over in the direction where she knew Duke was tied. Suddenly a sound made her stop under a tree and lean up against the trunk weak with fright. Her heart beat so wildly that it almost suffocated her.

Unmistakably some one was coming near in the darkness.

The bonfire had been beaten out by the rain. Not a star was visible to give a ray of light. In her fright, Beth knew the intruder must be one of the robbers the conductor had told about. She would have sneaked back to her father's tent to waken him if she had not feared running into a robber. In the darkness she could not distinguish a single object, and it was possible that there might be more than one robber around.

"I'm a goose," she told herself trying to be calm. "Probably it's papa or Harvey or——"

All at once Duke barked, and Beth was sure that it was none of their party. A stranger alone could thus excite him. She hoped his barking would rouse the others, and that they would come before the robber murdered her.

Rain-drops were leaking through the tree down on her but getting wet was the least of her troubles. She wanted to scream, but her throat was parched, and she stood rooted to the spot in speechless suspense.

Notwithstanding the dog's barking, the footsteps came nearer and nearer, and Duke grew more and more excited.

"Hush, hush," Beth heard some one mutter. The tones were not as fierce as a robber should use, Beth thought, but probably they were trying to be mild to pacify the dog.

"It didn't sound like a man at all, but then robbers are very deceiving," she decided. Then to her great surprise Duke quieted down in an instant.

"He's fooled too," she thought, disappointed not to have him show his usual sagacity. In fact so disappointed was she that it restored her own bravery.

"Sic 'em, Duke. Go for them," she yelled.

The same instant a melancholy cry right above her made her sink almost to the ground.

"Oo—oo—oo," came the ghastly call the second time, and Beth was so overcome with terror at the sound that she fled unmindful of what she encountered only so that she could get away from that weird voice. On she ran stumblingly, and the first thing she knew she and some one else had run into one another.

"Oh," almost sobbed Beth.

"Beth, Beth Davenport, hit's only me."

Beth did not see how Carol could be up in the mountains although it was unmistakably her voice.

"You're—you're sure it's you?" she murmured.

"Yes, yes, hit's me—Carol. What's the matter?"

Assured that it really was Carol, Beth clung to her almost as if she feared she grasped a spirit that might vanish.

"Did—you—hear—that awful sound up in the tree? There it is again. What is it, Carol?"

"That?" answered Carol reassuringly. "Don't yer know a hoot owl when yer hear one?"

Beth was thoroughly ashamed of her groundless terror.

"I'd have known if I hadn't been so frightened thinking that you were a robber, Carol."

"I wuz frightened 'bout yer," confessed Carol. "I 'lowed that per'aps I'd gotten to the wrong camp 'til I hearn Duke bark. An' when yer sicked him on, I couldn't b'lieve hit could be yer, but feared hit moight be a sperrit, an' that's why I didn't call out."

"Come inside the tent," said Beth, beginning to feel wet, and willing now that she had human companionship to forego Duke's presence.

"What's the matter? Who's there?" cried Marian, sitting up in bed as the two girls entered.

"Carol's come."

"Carol? That's nice."

By Marian's tones, and the way she sank back on the pillow, Beth knew she was only half awake. Julia did not even stir. Beth wondered why her call to Duke had not roused any one in the other tent, but their being so tired, probably accounted for it.

"How did you get here at this time of the night?" Beth whispered, her curiosity increasing the more she thought about the matter.

"I walked," quietly replied the mountain girl.

"Walked?" repeated Beth, more and more astonished. "Not in the dark and rain?" It seemed incredible to Beth.

Carol was shivering both with cold and excitement. "Thar war no other way to cum, an' so I jes' had to. I was sot to get here to-day, if hit war possible. The gal didn't cum to mind 'Liz'beth 'til powerful late."

How any one, especially a mere girl like herself, dared make a trip alone after nightfall, up a mountain that might be robber infested, was more than Beth could understand. She was most anxious to hear every detail of the romantic journey, but her consideration of others made her check her curiosity.

"You must be tired and wet," she said, half hoping she might be contradicted.

"My clothes be pretty well soaked," agreed Carol.

"You must get right undressed then. There's a place here beside me for you to sleep. Then you can tell me all that happened."

"I lost my bundle—thar warn't much in hit as I didn't want to tote much—jes' some night things. But when I was powerful scared, I dropped hit an' scooted."

This aroused Beth's interest more than ever, but she held herself well in check. She fumbled around in the dark until she felt her hamper.

"Here's a night-dress of mine. Jump into it as fast as ever you can, for I'm just dying to know what scared you."

"Whar shall I hang my clothes?"

"We have a line up at the other end of the tent, but don't stop to find it. Drop them on the floor anywhere."

Bed was so inviting, and Beth was evidently so anxious to have her beside her that Carol did as told, and in a moment more, was snuggling down under the most comfortable blanket, beneath which it had never been her lot to sleep.

"Now, Carol, tell me what scared you. Begin from the first."

Still Carol hesitated.

"Do go on," Beth whispered.

"Well, even after hit grew dark I never onct thought of bein' scared. I'm used to goin' 'round by myself, an' I played I was a bird an' sang an' sang. I couldn't fly like a bird, but hit didn't seem half so far by pretendin' 'though hit war powerful dark."

"Well I should say so," assented Beth. "I stubbed my own toes before I ran into you. I don't see how you dared come up alone."

"I wanted to cum so powerful much that's why. And not 'til I got up by the railroad track below here, did I have anythin' to really an' truly scare me. Then I got right in 'mong some men 'fore I knowed any was thar. The rain had

most beaten out their fire an' most had gone in the tent—they have a camp thar, an' I reckon they'd all been drinkin' an' some had drunk too much to know 'nough to get out of the rain. An' I ran right into one of 'em, an' he tried to grab me, but I jes' took to my heels an' scooted."

"And was it then that you dropped your bundle?"

"No, not 'til I hearn some one chasin' me. I dodged into the bushes an' I wuz that scared that I dropped my bundle, an' wouldn't stop to hunt hit."

"Did they catch you?"

"No, hit wuz so dark the man couldn't keep track of me, but I saw him agin."

"You did? My, you must have been terribly frightened. How did it happen?"

"I—I," stammered Carol, dreading to tell more, but seeing no way of evading Beth's questioning. "I 'most stumbled over him when I cum out from the bushes. For a moment, I 'lowed that he wuz dead, but I found that he war only drunk."

Beth marveled more and more over Carol's pluck.

"Carol, what ——"

"Beth, stop talking or I'll have papa make you," threatened Marian, who had been restless for a few minutes past.

"All right, Marian. Good-night, Carol."

"Good-night," murmured the mountain girl, but sleep would not come to relieve her mind.

"I'm mighty glad I didn't have to tell her," she thought, stifling her sobs. "I'd hate dreadful fer her to know. Supposin' I'd have had to say to her, 'The drunken man was my ——'" the last word was smothered by her tears.

Even when sleep finally came, it brought little rest to her mind. She dreamed that the man in the road had followed her to camp. She even thought she heard Duke barking, but that did not drive the man away. Then Carol cried out in her sleep :

"Go 'way. Don't come here an' make me wish myself dead."

So piercing was her cry that it not only wakened the girls, but Mr. Davenport and Harvey wakened also.

"What's the matter?" called Mr. Davenport.

Carol rubbed her eyes to make sure that she was only dreaming.

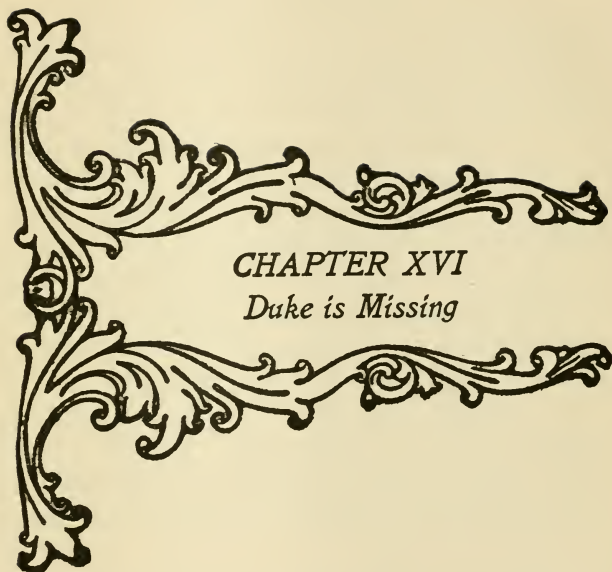
"I—I reckon I had the nightmare 'though I did think Duke really barked," she answered.

Mr. Davenport said no word to the girls, but he, too, thought Duke had barked, and that some one was moving near the tents. In fact to reassure himself that no intruder was about, he got up and looked outside. The storm was over and a full sized moon was shining clear.

Perfect quiet now reigned, and Mr. Davenport decided that his hearty supper had given him bad dreams, and that a search would not only be useless, but foolish.

"Everything's all right," he called across to the girls. "So go to sleep as I'm going to do."

Afterward Carol was troubled with no more dreams, although in fact her nightmare had more foundation than any of them thought. Still the camp slept on undisturbed until morning.



CHAPTER XVI

Duke is Missing

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"GIRLS, the coffee's steaming, and we have breakfast all ready. You must hurry if you're going to eat with us." These were the first words that greeted Beth in the morning.

She turned and saw Carol sitting up in bed.

"I'd have been up an age an' gotten breakfast fer you uns, but my clothes ain't whar I left 'em. They're gone sure."

"Gone?" repeated Beth, rubbing her eyes.

"Yes. Yer know I left 'em on the floor like yer said, an' yer kin see they hain't thar now."

Only for a moment was Beth troubled. To Carol's surprise, she smiled. It came to her that Harvey was playing a joke on them. She sprang out of bed and rushed to the opening of the tent.

"Harvey, Harvey!" she called, "we want to get up, so please bring back Carol's clothes!"

"Hello. You're awake, are you?" he answered.

"Now Harvey, do bring Carol's clothes right back."

"Carol's clothes," he repeated. "What are you talking about?"

"Now, Harvey, stop fooling, and bring them back. We must get dressed."

"I don't know anything about her clothes." He spoke so decidedly that Beth believed him, but she still thought there must be some trick about the clothes being gone. She hardly believed her father would indulge in such a joke, but did not know what effect camp life might have on him so she called:

"Papa, do you know where Carol's clothes are?"

Reassured that he knew nothing about them, Beth accused Gustus of being the mischief-maker which he emphatically denied.

"They can't be gone," declared Beth to Carol. "Where did you put them?"

"You must be mistaken," she added when Carol pointed to the floor near the edge of the tent. "Maybe you put them on the bed and they've fallen underneath." But, search as she did, the missing articles were nowhere to be found.

The other girls looked to see if any of their belongings were gone, but not a single article was missing except the clothing of Carol.

"They must have reached in an' jes' grabbed my things, an' maybe they were scared 'way when I cried out," said Carol.

"It's a perfect shame, Carol," Beth said when she had to admit that the clothes had been stolen.

"If anything had to be taken, it should have been some of our things instead of yours. You're our visitor, you know, and I was to blame for telling you to drop them on the floor."

"Yer didn't know," answered Carol, dispiritedly. She was greatly depressed, but it was caused more by a fear that had entered her mind than by the loss she had sustained. Not for the world would she voice her fear, and she tried not to think of it even.

"What can Carol wear?" demanded Julia.

"She can wear some of my things," answered Beth. "They'll be a little large, but it'll be better than staying in bed."

All of Beth's clothes proved vastly too large for Carol, nevertheless she arrayed herself in them without a murmur.

"You are a sight," said Beth, laughingly.

Carol felt the tears which she had been trying to choke down for some time rising, but Beth's thoughtless raillery made her lose control for a moment.

"Why, Carol, don't you know I'm only joking?" Beth whispered contritely, not wishing the girls to see Carol in tears.

Carol stifled her sobs. "I—I know hit an' hit—it ain't what yer said. No ——"

"Girls, you must hurry," called Mr. Davenport. "Breakfast is all on the table, and Harvey and I can't wait another moment."

"I—I don't like to have 'em see me," said Carol still with a catch in her voice.

"Don't you mind, Carol. I'll go out and make it all right, and then you come when I call."

Marion and Julia had gone out and now Beth skipped out leaving Carol alone. She sank down on the edge of the bed covering her face with her hands.

"She thinks hit's the clothes I mind," she moaned to herself. "But hit's worse to 'low as how yer own paw is ——"

"Come on, Carol," Beth called joyously. "They say they'll be glad to see you, no matter what you wear."

Carol rose and brushed the tears away, and started out obediently. She slipped into the vacant place at the table reserved for her, and Gustus, alone, outwardly noted her queer appearance. He was waiting on table and started to giggle, but a shake of the head from Beth turned the giggle into a cough.

"He, he—ho—I—I must done taken cole las' night," he muttered.

"Well, Carol, we're sorry, very sorry, that your visit has started so badly, but we'll make up your loss to you, and you must enjoy yourself immensely all the rest of the time you are with us," said Mr. Davenport kindly, as he passed a heaping plate her way.

"Papa, who do you suppose took the things?" asked Marian.

Carol choked over the mouthful she had just taken, and her heart beat convulsively.

"Some sneak thief most probably."

The color came back to Carol's face, but she had little appetite for her breakfast.

"I wish we could all go down to the train to meet mamma and Maggie, but I suppose somebody should watch camp especially after the robbery," said Beth. "I'd trust Duke to watch only being strange here he might run away."

"Let me stay with him," answered Carol. "I wouldn't like to go down this way. Do let me stay with him."

"Are you sure you don't mind, Carol?"

"No, I wants ter stay."

"Then the rest of us can all go. It'll be great fun for us all to escort them up here, and you'll not be long alone, Carol."

Carol assisted Gustus with the dishes, and then helped the girls with the beds, after which it was time to go to the train.

"Take good care of Duke. I wouldn't have him run away for the world," was Beth's parting injunction.

Immediately after they were gone, Carol began busying herself in preparing things for the noonday meal. First she fixed the table, and then she took a pan of potatoes and with Duke

beside her, sat down on a log to peel them. She was not in the least lonely for her mind and hands were both busy.

"Duke," she said, stopping a moment to pat his head, "yer mistress is powerful good to us both, an' we uns must do all we kin fer her. That's why I'm workin' now, so's she'll be pleased when they git back, fer then we'll all have time to visit, an' I have somethin' I must tell her. I don't know what to do. I want ter 'mount ter somethin' so's she'll be proud that she helped we uns, but I'd hate awful to leave her."

Carol went back to peeling potatoes, while in her eyes there came a far-off look for she was going over in her mind the visit Mrs. Morton had made her the afternoon before, and all that had been said. She had gone with Mrs. Morton down to the spring and there they had sat upon the very log where Beth had rested the day of her first memorable visit.

"Carol, my husband has telegraphed for me to come home because he finds it impossible to join me here as we had planned," began Mrs. Morton.

"I'm powerful sorry to have yer go. Yer've been so good to me," murmured Carol. "I'll hate never to see yer again, but perhaps yer'll be comin' down this way agin."

"That's very probable, Carol, but I want to take you North with me now."

"Take me North?" gasped Carol, not believing her senses.

"After I heard you sing, I decided your voice ought to be cultivated," continued Mrs. Morton. "Then when word came from my husband, I hurried right down here to ask you to go back with me. We live out in the country, but near the city, so that you could go in town for lessons, and I could help you, for I used to be quite musical myself."

"An' what could I ever do to pay yer back?"

Mrs. Morton looked at her very kindly, liking her more because her first thought was of gratitude. "There'll be many, many ways in which you can repay me, Carol. In the first place, your singing of itself will be a comfort to me, for I have little ambition to keep up my own playing, but with you there it will be different. Since my baby died"—she had to pause a moment before going on, "I never go any place, and my husband and I are lonely. He'll like to have you, I know. Your fondness for dogs will appeal to him, and then he'll be glad to have me take an interest in music again. He'll approve, I am sure. It is partly for his sake that I am asking you to go. Will you go?"

"How could I leave 'Liz'beth?"

Again Mrs. Morton liked her better for her unselfish thought. "I am a rich woman, Carol, that is, as far as money goes," she added. "My

father left me all he had, as my mother died before he did, and I had no brothers or sisters. Then my husband has more than enough for both of us, and, as you know, I have no children now."

Carol's heart went out more and more to her as she spoke. She realized more than ever what Mrs. Morton's loss had been to her, but she could think of no words of comfort.

"So," continued Mrs. Morton, after a moment, "I can well afford to pay your mother for letting me take you North with me, so that she can hire some one to take your place."

"Hit don't seem as if we'd be doin' much fer you alls in exchange."

Again Mrs. Morton smiled. "Do not worry over that part. Besides what I've told you that you are to do, I shall expect you to help in many ways about my house. I want you to try it for this coming winter, anyway, and then if my plan does not work—well, I'll send you back home. Neither of us will be worse off for the experience, I think. Will you go?"

Carol looked wistful. "Hit's not that I hain't thankful, but I'd like to talk hit—it over with Beth Davenport first."

"You must decide at once, for I will have to start home day after to-morrow;" but when she saw the blank look on Carol's face, she added, "or the day after that at the very latest."

"I couldn't go without seeing Beth Davenport," Carol cried. "But I'll go up to camp, an' if she says to go, I'll cum back to-morrow, an' go with yer."

Mrs. Morton was well satisfied with the arrangement, for she felt very sure of the advice Beth would give, so she went into the hut and made all necessary arrangements with Carol's mother.

And now as Carol sat on the log peeling potatoes she, herself, knew, although not a word had been said to Beth, that she was having her parting visit with Beth, unless one thing prevented.

"I'll have to tell Mrs. Morton 'bout las' night," Carol thought. "An' maybe she'll not want me then. Hit—it wouldn't be honorable not to tell. Maybe she'll think me a thief, too," and tears started afresh down Carol's pale cheeks.

A sudden growl from Duke made her start and look around. Standing not far from her was a man with his back toward her. She jumped to her feet and the dish of potatoes fell to the ground while some of them rolled out on the dirt, but Carol was unmindful of this.

"Paw," she cried shrilly, "what yer doin' here?"

"Hello, Carol, I met the folks down below an' they tole me yer were here alone," he answered coolly.

She hardly knew whether to believe him. She feared he might have come with some evil intent—not to her, but to the camp.

“Oh, paw!” she cried, breaking into tears, “only go ’way an’ I’ll never tell.”

“What yer talkin’ ’bout, Carol?” he demanded, seemingly both puzzled and angry.

“Yer know, paw. I mean ’bout yer bein’ here last night.”

He eyed her suspiciously. “I warn’t near here last night—no sech thing.”

“Paw, I wouldn’t have believed hit myself if I hadn’t knowed that hit war yer drunk by yer words when I stumbled over yer in the dark,” she responded solemnly.

He looked at her sullenly but made no answer.

“Paw, do yer deny that yer war down below drunk las’ night?” she demanded after a moment more of painful silence.

Still he made no reply, but he hung his head, which was sufficient acknowledgment to Carol, who had expected no denial, for she thought her father a truthful man when sober.

“Paw, war hit ’cause yer war drunk that yer cum here an’ st ——” she could not bring herself to say stole although the taking of her clothes was a theft. So she substituted, “took my clothes?”

Now he looked her full in the face. “Took yer clothes?” he repeated. “I don’t know what yer mean.”

She gazed at him intently to judge him by his expression as well as by his words, and the puzzled look on his face made her hopeful.

"Jes' after I met yer on the road las' night some one cum here an' stole my clothes from the tent thar an' I feared hit war yer. Didn't yer do hit, paw? Didn't yer do hit?" she demanded, feverishly.

Surging red blood arose in his face, but still his eye did not waver before hers. "I know I've sunk low, Carol, but not that low, an' hit's ter'ble that my own chile thinks that mean of me. I see that yer think me a thief."

The accusing look on her face gave way to joy. She was so glad that she was almost hysterical. "I don't think hit now, paw. I don't think hit now, an' a powerful bad feelin's gone from here," she cried, placing her hand over her heart.

"An' yer clothes war really took?" he questioned. And when she nodded her head, he continued, "Some of them men down thar took um then, Carol. They're a pretty bad lot, an' even while I wuz drinkin' with um las' night I wanted to get 'way from um. An' when yer ran into me an' I knowed yer even though hit war dark, I had a feelin' yer moight save me from um an' so when yer run from me that's why I run after yer. Why did yer run from me, Carol?"

Now it was her turn to hang her head. "At

firs' I didn't know yer an' war scared, an' then, an' then ——" she faltered.

"An' then yer knowed me an' war more scared," and she could not deny his statement. Whereupon he turned to Duke and began patting his head as if seeking comfort from the dog. Duke did not repel his advances, but seemed to enjoy them.

"Is this the animal that's worth so much, Carol?"

She nodded at him through her tears.

"I'd like the money yer'd bring moightily," muttered Samuel Cornwell, and added, "I cum here, Carol, to bid yer good-bye. Yer'll not see me fer a long time, an' maybe never, 'less I do better."

"Ye're goin' 'way, paw!" she cried, remorsefully.

"Yes, so good-bye, Carol."

"Yer'll go an' say good-bye to maw," she begged.

He shook his head stubbornly. "'Tain't best, an' I won't do hit."

"Paw ——"

"I'll not listen to no more," and away he started toward the road.

Carol was half minded to follow, but, from past experience, she knew that pleading was of no avail, and so instead she turned and walked down the path toward the falls, forgetting in her ex-

citement that Duke had been left to her charge. At first, he was inclined to go with her but when he saw that she took no notice of him, he turned and without her heeding his action in the least started down the road after Samuel Cornwell. The man, unheeding the dog, soon turned from the main road into a path through the woods that was a shorter cut down the mountain and Duke followed stealthily in the path after him.

Meantime, Carol at the falls seated herself on a rock a short distance below them.

"I'm so glad he didn't take the things," she kept thinking over and over to herself.

"Thar's nothin' to keep me now from goin'," she added presently. "I'll have to walk down home this afternoon, but that'll be nothin'. Hit's sayin' good-bye to Beth Davenport I mind. I love Mrs. Morton, but not like I love Beth Davenport, an' bein' with Mrs. Morton won't be like bein' with Beth though Mrs. Morton's powerful good to me, an' when I'm up North with her, I'll do everythin' I kin fer her."

Then she began speculating as to what her home in the North would be like, and she knew vaguely that she would miss the mountains, for Mrs. Morton had told her the country around her home was mostly flat except for a few hills. But it was of the singing lessons that she had been promised that she thought the most.

Hardly did it seem credible that she, Carol, was to have her voice cultivated.

Suddenly she remembered that it must be fully time for the campers to be returning from the train. She knew by the sun that it was growing late. She arose hastily and hurried back to the tents, where she first missed Duke.

"Duke, Duke! Come, Duke!" she called, wildly, but no dog came bounding at the call. Over and over she cried his name, even more frantically, but without response. Whereupon she broke down crying helplessly.

Suddenly it came to her that perhaps he had only wandered down to meet Beth. Hastily she ran out to the road and started down-hill to see.

In a moment, even before she could see any of them because of the turn in the road, she heard their voices. Carol felt as if she was suffocating. She hurriedly rushed behind some bushes at the side of the road that would perfectly screen her from their sight.

"I can't see her if Duke's not with her. I can't do hit," she sobbed to herself. "I'd never dare see her agin if he's gone."

As they drew near so fearful was Carol that she hardly dared peek out, but at last, holding her breath for fear of being detected, she looked.

Duke was not with them.

Too overcome for tears, as they passed, she sank down on the ground where she was hiding

and an utterly hopeless look settled on her face. Her father's words kept ringing in her ears.

"Is this the animal that's worth so much, Carol?" And then right afterward, "I'd like the money yer'd bring moightily."

"He's a thief after all. He's stolen the dog, and Beth Davenport 'll hate me ever an' ever," muttered Carol fiercely.

Her next impulse was to fly, as if she herself were the thief who might be pursued. Assuring herself that the campers were beyond sight, she stole out on the road and fled panting down toward the railroad. On and on she sped, neither saving of her breath nor strength. Unreasoning fear drove her on.

At the railroad she paused uncertain which way to turn, and now her reasoning power revived.

"If I but knowed which way paw went, I moight overtake him an' get Duke back. He's a big start of me, but I'd run 'til I dropped, but I can't tell which way to go. Oh, God! show me how to go," she prayed.

While she stood undecided which course to pursue, the thought flashed into her mind, "If I go to the camp whar he was las' night, I may find him thar."

So she hastened to the camp, which she had no trouble in locating, as it was only across the track by the roadside.

No one, seemingly, was around the place, but the flaps of the tent were tied back, which allowed Carol to peek within.

The first object her eye beheld was her stolen bundle of clothes on the floor. So surprised was she at this discovery that she did not see a man partly hidden under a blanket over in the farthest corner of the tent, but he was not sleeping, and happened to have his face her way.

"What yer doin' here?" he demanded gruffly, sitting up.

Carol was so startled and frightened that she simply stood still, gazing helplessly at the dark tousled head with its sinister face.

"What yer up to, I say?" he again demanded.

"I—I'm huntin' my paw," she finally stammered.

"Who be yer paw?"

"Sam'el Cornwell. Have yer seen him?"

"No, he hain't been back here since las' night."

In one way the answer was a relief to Carol, for if her father had not been near the place, he could not have left the bundle there. But to make more positive, she asked timidly:

"He—he didn't leave anythin' here, did he? Whose bundle is that?"

The man scowled at her suspiciously. "Who sent yer 'round here axin' questions?"

"No one. I'm jes' huntin' my paw."

The answer quieted the man's suspicions, for

he saw by her looks that Carol was unmistakably Cornwell's daughter, as she said.

"That bundle's mine. Some friends up on the mountain want me to keep hit fer um, but they fooled me into thinkin' hit moight be worth somethin', but hit ain't," he explained. "Don't bother me no more. I wanter sleep," he added, crossly.

Carol did not dare claim her belongings, for the man looked so evil that she did not know what he might do to her. To have proof positive that her father did not steal the bundle, made her so thankful that in her present state of mind, it made little difference if she never got her clothes back.

Whichever way she decided to take, she knew the railroad track was a more direct line than any road, therefore hurried back that way.

"I'll go toward home," she decided, "an' if I can't get Duke back, I'll go 'way with Mrs. Morton, so 's Beth'll 'low that's why I ran off."

Around a curve, down the track, she flew, when suddenly just ahead of her were two men working over a hand-car.

"Maybe they'll 'low me to ride with um," she thought, and then she noted that they both wore convict stripes.

"What kin I do?" she wondered, with her heart thumping wildly. "If I go on, they may

do somethin' to me, but if I don't go on, I'll never get Duke back."

She was greatly inclined to hide in the woods at her right, and even started that way, until she saw one of the convicts looking at her.

"Have yer seen anythin' of a man with a dog?" she faltered.

"No," he answered, and added to his companion, "Thar, Bill, I reckon as how hit may hold 'til we get down the mountain," and on the car they jumped.

Quickly Carol decided on heroic measures.

"Wait!" she cried, running to them.

"They don't look as bad as the man in the tent," she thought. "If they didn't wear stripes, thar'd be nothin' to fear, an' I jes' must trust um anyhow."

"Can't I ride with yer?" she begged. "Please, please let me ride. I'm in a ter'ble hurry," she added.

Doubtfully, they eyed her, and she thought they were escaping from justice, and feared her betraying them.

"I—I won't tell," she murmured.

Her words were unmeaning to them, and one of the convicts said:

"The brake's out of order, an' hit moight go wrong agin, an' then no tellin' what'd happen."

"I'm not skeered, an' if yer'll only let me ride, I'll not blame yer if I'm hurt."

"All right then. Hop on, an' hole on tight. In a few minutes, we'll be comin' to the stiffest grade here'bouts."

In an instant she was up beside them and away they started. Then it came to Carol that if she did not see her father on the way that she should get off at Tremont, but her convict companions might object to her so doing.

"Will yer be skeered to let me off at Tremont?" This question formed in her mind, but she was too fearful of their displeasure to say it aloud. Over and over she tried to think of some better way of putting it to them.

"We're only goin' as far as Tremont," announced one of the convicts, greatly to her relief.

"They're not runnin' 'way then," she thought. Now she remembered that a few of the best convicts were sometimes sent on errands. Up in the mountains she had seen convicts working the roads, and knew that those that were about to be released were trusted.

By this time, the car was beginning to fly down grade. Peering ahead, Carol saw that an exciting ride lay before her. The road-bed wound along the side of the mountain and sometimes there was a wall of rock to the right, while to the left was a sheer descent into the valley below. Again the way had been cut through solid rock, and they flew faster and faster every second.

"Put the brake on, Bill. Is hit goin' to hol'?"

"Yes," but, even as the answer came, the brake again refused to hold.

"Hit won't work. I can't nohow make hit work," cried Bill, in terror. "I'll jes' have to let her go."

"An' goin' may land us in hell. Hol' on, gal, fer yer life!"

No such warning was needed by Carol. She was holding on with all her might. Notwithstanding they were going so fast that it took her breath away, she was not particularly frightened. Being so wrought up over the loss of Duke, made her unmindful of what became of her.

"Maybe if Beth Davenport sees me dead, she'll fergive me," she thought.

Yet to be dashed to pieces down among those immense rocks seemed so horrible that she was almost tempted to jump.

"Hol' on!" cried the convict again, perhaps reading her thought.

The trees on either side now seemed like mere shadows, and the landscape was all one blotted mass at the speed they were flying.

"If hit don't jump the track, we'll come out all right. The way's clear so's we won't run into anythin'," cried Bill.

That instant they rounded a curve which revealed in the path just ahead a man, while beside

him trudged a dog, both unconscious of the threatening danger.

Now for the first time Carol turned deathly white.

"Paw, oh, paw!" she yelled.

Duke bounded from the track, barking as he did so. Fortunately, Samuel Cornwell heeded the warning. Without looking backward he sprang after the dog just as the hand-car grazed past.

Weak from what had just happened Carol's hold relaxed. Dangerously near the edge of the car she swayed, but, just in time to save her from falling over into the ravine, the convict caught her.

"What yer doin'? Hole on thar," he commanded gruffly.

Mechanically, she obeyed. Slowly an intense desire to live possessed her mind. How terrible she felt it would be not to live; not to go back for Duke. More and more with the wish for life, she realized the danger of the situation. Then suddenly a new peril confronted them.

"My God, ain't that a train comin'?" yelled Bill.

Around the curve, just below the down flying hand-car, a freight train, side-tracked many hours because of a hot-box, was now slowly puffing.

"We'll be smashed dead. Thar ain't no hope fer us."

But Bill, undaunted in the face of death, began frantically fumbling again at the brake although still fearing there was no possibility of making it work.

The engineer of the freight, shuddering at sight of the hand-car, had the presence of mind to reverse his engine.

Samuel Cornwell, still somewhat dazed from his own narrow escape, was horrified by the tragedy threatening his child.

"Oh, God ! I've been a poor father, an' I don't know as I ever can be a good un, but spare Carol, an' I'll try," he prayed which was the first prayer he had uttered for years. His child's peril made many, many bitter regrets surge through his mind strengthening him in his resolve to atone for the past if he could.

Strange to say, as Carol faced death, bitter accusations against her father lessened. Her mind even dwelt on him pityingly.

"If hit hadn't been fer lickin', he'd 'ave been a good paw," she thought, while a picture of herself as a little child on her father's lap flashed into her mind. She had loved him dearly then.

"If he hadn't stole Duke, I'd love him still," she sobbed to herself. "He didn't know how wicked hit wuz. Maybe hit'll cum to him that hit wuz wrong, an' he'll take Duke back even if I don't live to ask hit. Anyway, I can't die not fergivin' my paw. God make him do right."

Tears blinded her sight, but she believed that any instant might be her last.

"God bless 'Liz'beth an' Beth Davenport an' Mrs. Morton, an' all the rest," she prayed as an earthly parting from her best beloved.

"Hit's workin' agin. The brake's sho'ly workin'," cried Bill.

Hastily Carol brushed the tears away, and saw that slowly but surely their awful speed was lessening. The reprieve from death seemed too good to be true.

"Ain't we uns goin' to be killed?" she murmured.

"No, fer even if we do buck into the freight, hit won't do us much damage now."

Within a few feet of the freight, the hand-car was brought to a standstill without even "bucking" it.

"Brakes be moighty quar things," muttered Bill jumping to the ground. "When I 'lowed hit wuz broke agin, hit must only have been caught. Wall, pard," he added, wringing his companion's hand, "death'd cum hard jes' as we uns air to be freed."

Carol watched as the two removed the hand-car from the track. Then the freight puffed away, whereupon the convicts replaced the hand-car on the track ready to proceed.

"Have yer had 'nuff, young un? Air yer scared?" demanded Bill.

Carol shook her head. "'Tain't that I'm scared." She looked up the track to where her father and Duke were approaching slowly. "I'll wait fer him. He's my paw. I'm much 'bliged fer my ride."

Bill laughed. "Wall, hit wuz excitin' at any rate."

A large, ornate decorative scrollwork element on the left side of the page, featuring intricate flourishes and a central vertical stem that branches out into horizontal scrolls.

CHAPTER XVII
Northward Bound

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THE nearer Samuel Cornwell came, the more Carol's heart sank. She was bound to have Duke back but she dreaded accusing her father, so she waited for him to speak first.

He, on his side, was also embarrassed. It was unusual for him to be so deeply stirred as he had been when he thought Carol would be dashed to pieces, but now he did not wish her to see how much he had cared. He had, therefore, waited to grow calmer before joining her.

"Wall, Carol, air yer goin' on hum now?" was all he asked.

"No, I'm goin' back to camp," and her eyes flashed, thinking of Duke.

"Then yer kin take him back with yer," he answered indicating Duke.

Tears rose in her eyes so glad was she that he had repented. "Why did yer take him?" she demanded impetuously.

"I didn't take him. He followed me."

She looked as incredulous as she felt, and he, noting it, cried :

"Carol, yer didn't think I stole him?"

There was such a ring of horror in his voice and his manner was such that she instantly knew that she had misjudged him. Rather than to let him see how she had suspected him, she chose to lie outright.

"Of course, I didn't think hit, paw."

His look softened. "Hit wuz this way, Carol. He followed me a long ways, 'fore I seed him, an' then I tried to drive him back, but he wuz bound to follow. I reckon he wanted ter go hum bein' strange up thar. That's the way I figgered hit out. An' when he wouldn't go back I 'cided to let him keep on with me an' leave him at the Davenports'. I hated ter go way back with him anyways, 'sides which I wuz still sore at yer fer thinkin' I took things."

Carol was thoroughly contrite now. "Paw, I know yer didn't take um an' I'm awful sorry I ever 'lowed yer did," and then she told about finding the bundle at camp, and added, "Yer must fergive me, paw. I'm goin' North with a lady an' I don't want yer to think hard of me." At first she had not intended to tell him about Mrs. Morton's offer, but now that her heart had melted toward him, she withheld nothing from him.

"Carol, hit's a great chance," he said, and then hesitated. "An'—an'—I don't dare promise nothin', but I 'low yer'll be happier if yer knows I'm goin' to try to do better."

"Oh, paw," was all she answered, but the way she said it fully satisfied him, and strengthened him in his resolve.

Then she kissed him good-bye, and started up the mountain with Duke. The way seemed short to her now that her mind was at peace.

Half-way up the road to Melrose she beheld Beth searching for her and Duke.

"He wandered off, an' I went to find him," was all Carol said in explanation.

"We didn't know what to think," answered Beth, and then because her mind was full of another matter she let the subject drop. "Carol, mamma's been telling me about your going North with Mrs. Morton. Why didn't you tell me about it? I'm so pleased I don't know what to say. It's almost too good to be true. Aren't you delighted?"

They were walking side by side, with arm locked in arm, and Beth was so excited over Carol's good fortune that she would have skipped along had not Carol seemed so stolid.

"Aren't you pleased?" Beth demanded again.

"Yes, I'm pleased, but——" Carol could hardly keep the tears down. "Hit's hard to leave yer and 'Liz'beth. I can't help thinkin' of that."

"Well, I'll write you good long letters, an' I'll be so proud to hear of the progress you're making."

Carol looked at her wistfully. "Will yer really be proud if I get 'long well?"

"I'll be awfully, awfully proud."

Her enthusiasm cheered her companion. "That'll make me try more'n ever," and Carol smiled appreciatively. "An' Mrs. Morton said as how I can take Brune with me. That'll make me less lonesome."

"I'm sorry for one thing. Mrs. Morton has sent for you to come back to Tremont on the afternoon train. She received another telegram that makes it positively necessary for her to leave tomorrow morning."

By this time they were back at camp, and Carol was given a belated luncheon, Maggie, herself, bringing out extra dainties for her.

"I'll think when I'm way up North of yer. 'Though I don't know how to thank yer in words, I do thank yer in my heart fer havin' been so good to we uns," said Carol to Maggie.

"Go 'long, chile. I ain't done nothin', nohow. It's all Missy Beth."

"I know yer only does hit fer me 'cause of her, an'——"

"I don't do it for her only. Ever since yo' sang that day, yo' sang yo'self right into my heart, chile." Maggie was surprised at herself for owning as much, but now that Carol was going away she wanted a favor of her, and was leading up to the subject. "When yo' sings, it's

jes' like I wuz back in Floridah, an' de sun am shinin' an' thar ain't nothin' to bother this ole black woman. Would you mind, chile, singin' jes' once more fer me?"

"Would yer really like me to sing?" Carol was very much pleased that she could do something for Maggie, so she sat down on a rock and with Maggie near by, began one of her bird warblings.

Attracted by her singing, the other campers came noiselessly to listen, but Carol was not disturbed, as she was only thinking of pleasing Maggie.

On and on she sang, pondering over what Maggie had said about the sun shining, and there being no trouble. The joyousness of the picture rang forth in her notes, while the sound from the flowing falls made a pleasing accompaniment.

Their applause, as she finished, embarrassed her so that she did not know what to say or do.

"Carol, if you only apply yourself, you'll make a very fine singer. You must be very thankful, because this great opportunity has come to you," cried Mrs. Davenport, enthusiastically.

"I am thankful," murmured Carol, and then she tried to say what she had been thinking for a long time. "Hit's 'cause yer gal wuz so powerful good that everythin' nice has happened. 'Fore I go, I'd like to tell you uns what I think, but I can't do hit—it." So overcome was she that she

fled toward the falls. Beth flew after her, as she wished to be with her protégé every moment of Carol's few remaining hours in camp.

"Beth has been good to her, but there is another point to consider," said Mrs. Davenport to her husband. "This opportunity would never have come to Carol if God had not given her a wonderful voice; Mrs. Morton told me so herself. What will that voice do for Carol? It will probably raise her above the position of her birth, but will doing this be a real blessing? I feel a great responsibility about the child, for Beth's entertainment brought Carol's voice to the notice of Mrs. Morton."

Maggie answered before Mr. Davenport could speak.

"Don't yo' worry, Miss Mary. Dat voice couldn't be nothin' but a blessin'. Why it melted dis dry, ole heart ob mine 'til dere's nothin' I wouldn't do for dat chile. Den 'sides her voice, Carol has a heart ob gold. I didn't see it at furst myself, not even dough Missy Beth did, but now I do, an' I'm proud ob Missy Beth fer 'scoverin' Carol ob Carolina, a rale progidy."





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